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ARMOREL OF LYONESSE

A Romance of To-day

BY

WALTER BESANT

AUTHOR OF 'ALL SORTS AND CONDITIONS OF MEN' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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CONTENTS

OF

THE THIRD VOLUME

PART II—(continued)

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVII.	THE NATIONAL GALLERY	1
XVIII.	CONGRATULATIONS	20
XIX.	WHAT NEXT?	37
XX.	A RECOVERY AND A FLIGHT	56
XXI.	ALL LOST BUT——	77
XXII.	THE END OF WORLDLY TROUBLES	113
XXIII.	THE HOUR OF TRIUMPH	141
XXIV.	THE CUP AND THE LIP	151
XXV.	TO FORGET IT ALL	188
XXVI.	NOT THE HEIR, AFTER ALL	213
XXVII.	THE DESERT ISLAND	225
XXVIII.	AT HOME	245
XXIX.	THE TRESPASS OFFERING	266

ARMOREL OF LYONESSE

PART II

CHAPTER XVII

THE NATIONAL GALLERY

Contrary to all reasonable expectation, Alec Feilding called at Armorel's rooms the very next morning—and quite early in the morning, when it was not yet eleven. Armorel, however, had already gone out. He was received by Mrs. Elstree, who was, as usual, sitting, apparently asleep, by the fire.

'You have come in the hope of seeing Armorel alone, I suppose?' she said

'Yes. You remember, Zoe,' he replied quickly—she observed that he was pale, and that he fidgeted nervously, and that his eyes,

restless and scared, looked as if somebody was hunting him—'that we had a talk about it. You said you wouldn't make a row. You know you did. You consented.'

'Oh, yes! I remember. I am to play another part, and quite a new one. You too are about to play a new part—one not generally desired—quite the stage villain.' He made a gesture of impatience. 'Consider, however,' she went on quickly, before he could speak. 'Do you think this morning—the day after yesterday—quite propitious for your purpose?'

'What do you mean?' he asked quickly. 'Why not the day after yesterday?'

'Nothing. Still, if I might advise——'

'Zoe, you know nothing at all. And time presses. If there was reason, a week ago, for me to be the reputed and accepted lover of this girl, there is tenfold more reason now. You don't know, I say. For Heaven's sake don't spoil things now by any interference.'

He was at least in earnest. Mrs. Elstree contemplated him with curiosity. It seemed

as if she had never seen him really in earnest before. But now she understood. He knew by this time that Armorel had discovered the source, the origins, of his greatness. She might destroy him by a word. This knowledge would pierce the hide of the most pachydermatous: his strength, you see, was like that of Samson—it depended on a secret: it also now resembled that of Samson in that it lay at the mercy of a woman.

'Alec,' said Mrs. Elstree, softly, 'you were greatly moved last night by several things—by the play, by the picture, by the song. I watched you. While the rest were listening to the play, I watched you. The room was dark, and you thought no one could see you. But I could make out your features. Armorel watched you, too, but for other motives. I was wondering. She was triumphant. You know why?'

'What do you know?'

'Your face, which is generally so well under command, expressed surprise, rage, disgust, and terror—all these passions, dear Alec.

On the stage we study how to express them. We represent an exaggeration so that the gallery shall understand, and we call it Art. But I know the symptoms.'

'What else do you know, I ask?'

'This morning you are nervous and agitated. You are afraid of something. Alec, you know what I think of the cruelty and hardheartedness of this project of yours—to sustain your credit on an engagement which will certainly not last a month—I could not possibly suffer the girl to be entangled longer than that—now give it over.'

'I cannot give it over: it is my only chance. Zoe, you don't know the mischief she has done me, and will do me again. It is ruin—ruin!'

'Well then, Alec, don't go after her to-day. Indeed, I advise you not. You are not in a condition to approach the subject, and she is not in a condition to be approached. I do not ask your reasons, or the kind of mischief you mean. I sit here and watch. In the course of time I find out all things.'

'How much do you know, Zoe? What have you found out?'

'Knowledge, Alec, is power. Should I part in a moment, and for nothing, with what I have acquired at the expense of a great deal of contriving and putting together? Certainly not. You can go and find Armorel, if you persist in choosing such a day for such a purpose. She has gone, I believe, to the National Gallery.'

'I must find her to-day. I must bring things to a head. Good Heavens! I don't know what new mischief they may be designing.'

'Go home and wait, Alec. No one will do anything to you to-day. You are nervous and excited.'

'You don't understand, I say. Tell me, did the men talk last night—about me—in your hearing?'

'Not in my hearing, certainly. Go home and rest, Alec.'

'I cannot rest. I must find the girl.'

'Well, if you want her—go and find her. Alec, remember, if you stood the faintest

chance of success with her, I think I should have to get up and warn her. Even for your sake I do not think I could suffer this wickedness to be done. But you have no chance—none—not on any day, particularly on this day—and after last night. Go, however—go.'

When things have gone so far that assignations and appointments are made and places of secret meeting agreed upon, there is hardly any place in the whole of London more central, more convenient, or safer than the National Gallery. Here the young lady of society may be perfectly certain of remaining undiscovered. At the South Kensington no one is quite safe, because in the modern enthusiasm for art all kinds of people—even people in society—sometimes go there to see embroideries and hangings, and handiwork of every sort. The India Museum is perhaps safer even than the National Gallery—safer, for such a purpose, than any other spot in the world. But there is a loneliness in its galleries which strikes a chill to the most

ardent heart, and damps the spirit of the most resolute lover.

In the National Gallery there are plenty of people: but they are all country visitors, or Americans, or copyists: never any people of the young lady's own set: and there is never any crowd. One can sit and talk undisturbed and quiet: the copyists chatter or go on with their work regardless of anything: the attendants slumber: the visitors pass round room after room, looking for pictures which have a story to tell—and a story which they can read. That, you see, is the only kind of picture—unless it be a picture of a pretty face—which the ordinary visitor commonly understands. Not many young people know of this place, and those who do keep the knowledge to themselves. The upper rooms of the British Museum are also commended by some for the same reason, but the approaches are difficult.

This use of the National Gallery once understood, the thing which happened here the day after the reading of the play will not

seem incredible, though it certainly was not intended by the architect when he designed the building. Otherwise there might have been convenient arbours.

Armorel went often to the Gallery: the English girl reserves, as a rule, her study of pictures, and art generally, till she gets to Florence. Armorel, who had also studied art in Florence, found much to learn in our own neglected Gallery. Sometimes she went alone: sometimes she went with Effie, and then, being quite a learned person in the matter of pictures and their makers, she would discourse from room to room, till the day was all too short. The country visitors streamed past her in languid procession: the lovers met by appointment at her very elbow: the copyists flirted, talked scandal, wasted time, and sighed for commissions: but Armorel had not learned to watch people: she came to see the pictures: she had not begun to detach an individual from the crowd as a representative: in other words, she was not a novelist.

This morning she was alone. She carried a notebook and pencil, and was standing before a picture making notes. It was a wet morning: the rooms were nearly empty, and the galleries were very quiet.

She heard a manly step striding across the floor. She half turned as it approached her. Mr. Alec Feilding took off his hat.

'Mrs. Elstree told me you were here,' he said. 'I ventured to follow.'

'Yes?'

'You—you—come often, I believe?' He looked pale, and, for the first time in Armorel's recollection of him, he was nervous. 'There is, I believe, a good deal to be learned here.'

'There is, especially by those who want to paint—of course, I mean—who want to do their own paintings by themselves. Mr. Feilding, frankly, what do you want? Why do you come here in search of me?' Her face hardened: her eyes were cold and resolved. But the man was full of himself; he noted not these symptoms.

'I came because I have something to say.'

'Of importance?'

'Of great importance.'

'Not, I hope, connected with Art. Do not talk to me about Art, if you please, Mr. Feilding—not about any kind of Art.'

He bowed gravely. 'One cannot always listen to conversation involving canons and first principles,' he said, with much condescension. 'Let me, however, congratulate you on the promise of your protégés, Archie and Effie Wilmot.'

'They are clever.'

'They are distinctly clever,' he repeated, recovering his usual self-possession. 'Effie, as perhaps she has told you, has been my pupil for a long time.'

'She has told me, in fact, something about her relations to you.'

'Yes.' The man was preoccupied and rather dense by nature. Therefore he caught only imperfectly these side meanings in Armorel's replies. 'Yes—quite so—I have

been able to be useful to her, and to her brother also—very useful, indeed, happily.'

'And to—to others—as well—very useful, indeed,' Armorel echoed.

He understood that there was some kind of menace in these words. But the very air, this morning, was full of menace. He passed them by.

'It is a curious coincidence that you should also have taken up this interesting pair. It ought to bring us closer.'

'Quite the contrary, Mr. Feilding. It puts us far more widely apart.'

'I do not understand that. We have a common interest. For instance, only the other day I accepted a poem of Effie's——'

'Only the other day, Mr. Feilding?'

'Yes, the day before yesterday. I had it set up, and I added a few words introducing the writer. That was the day before yesterday. Judge of my astonishment when, only yesterday, you sang that very song, and handed it round printed with the accompaniment. I have made no alteration. The

verses will appear to-night, with my laudatory introduction. Some men might complain that they had not been taken into confidence. But I do not. Effie is a little genius in her way. She is not practical: she does not understand that having disposed of her verses to one editor she is not free to give them to another. But I do not complain, if your action in her cause brings her into notice.'

Here was a turning of tables! Now, some men overdo a thing. They smile too much: they rub their hands nervously: they show a nervous anxiety to be believed. Not so this man. He spoke naturally—he had now recovered his usual equanimity: he looked blankly unconscious that any doubt could possibly be thrown upon his word. Since he said it, the thing must be so. Men of honour have always claimed and exacted this concession. Therefore, the following syllogism:—

Mr. Alec Feilding is a man of honour :
Everybody must acknowledge so much.
A man of honour cannot lie :
Else—what becomes of his honour ?
Therefore :
Any statement made by Mr. Alec Feilding is literally true.

Armorel showed no doubt in her face. Why should she? There was no doubt in her mind. The man was a Liar.

'The Wilmots will get on,' she said coldly, 'without any help from anybody. Now, Mr. Feilding, you came to say something important to me. Shall we go on to that important communication?' She took a seat on the divan in the middle of the room. He stood over her. 'There is no one here this morning,' she said. 'You can speak as freely as in your own study.'

'Among your many fine qualities, Miss Rosevean,' he began floridly, but with heightened colour, 'a certain artistic reserve is reckoned by your friends, perhaps, the highest. It makes you queenly.'

'Mr. Feilding, I cannot possibly discuss my own qualities with any but my friends.'

'Your friends! Surely, I also——'

'My friends, Mr. Feilding,' Armorel repeated, bristling like the fretful porcupine. But the man, preoccupied and thick of skin, and full of vainglory and conceit, actually did not perceive these quills erect. Armorel's pointed remarks did not prick his hide: her coldness he took for her customary reserve. Therefore he hurried to his doom.

'Give me,' he said, 'the right to speak to you as your dearest friend. You cannot possibly mistake the attentions that I have paid to you for the last few weeks. They must have indicated to you—they were, indeed, deliberately designed to indicate—a preference—deepening into a passion——'

'I think you had better stop at once, Mr. Feilding.'

There are many men who honestly believe that they are irresistible. It seems incredible, but it is really true. It is the consciousness of masculine superiority carried to an extreme. They think that they have only to repeat the conventional words in the conventional

manner for the woman to be subjugated. They come: they conquer. Now, this man, who plainly saw that he was to a certain extent—he did not know how far—detected, actually imagined that the woman who had detected him in a gigantic fraud one day would accept his proffered hand and heart the very next day! There are no bounds, you see, to personal vanity. Besides, for this man, if it was necessary that he should appear as the accepted suitor of a rich girl, it was doubly necessary that the girl should be the one woman in the world who could do mischief. He was anxious to discover how much she knew. But of his wooing he had no anxiety at all. He should speak: she would yield: she could do nothing else.

'Permit me,' he replied blandly, 'to go on. I am, as you know, a leader in the world of Art. I am known as a painter, a poet, and a writer of fiction. I have other ambitions still.'

'Doubtless you will succeed in these as you have succeeded in those three Arts.'

'Thank you.' He really did not see the meaning of her words. 'I take your words as of happy augury. Armorel——'

'No, Sir! Not my Christian name, if you please.'

'Give me the right to call you by your Christian name.'

'You are asking me to marry you. Is that what you mean?'

'It is nothing less.'

'Really! When I tell you, Mr. Feilding, that I know you—that I know you—it will be plain to you that the thing is absolutely impossible.'

'To know me,' he replied, showing no outward emotion, 'should make it more than possible. What could I wish better than to be known to you?'

She looked him full in the face. He neither dropped his eyes nor changed colour.

'What could be better for me?' he repeated. 'What could I hope for better than to be known?'

'Oh! This man is truly wonderful!' she cried. 'Must I tell you what I know?'

'It would be better, perhaps. You look as if you knew something to my—actually—if I may say so—actually to my discredit!'

Armorel gasped. His impudence was colossal.

'To your discredit! Oh! Actually to your discredit! Sir, I know the whole of your disgraceful history—the history of the past three or four years. I know by what frauds you have passed yourself off as a painter and as a poet. I know by what pretences you thought to lay the foundation for a reputation as a dramatist. I know that your talk is borrowed—that you do not know art when you see it: that you could never write a single line of verse—and that of all the humbugs and quacks that ever imposed themselves upon the credulity of people you are the worst and biggest.'

He stared with a wonder which was, at least, admirably acted.

'Good Heavens!' he said. 'These words

—these accusations—from you? From Armorel Rosevean—cousin of my cousin—whom I had believed to be a friend? Can this be possible? Who has put this wonderful array of charges into your head?'

'That matters nothing. They are true, and you know it.'

'They are so true,' he replied sternly, 'that if anyone were to dare to repeat these things before a third person, I should instantly—instantly—instruct my solicitors to bring an action for libel. Remember: youth and sex would not avail to protect that libeller. If anyone—anyone—dares, I say——'

'Oh! say no more. Go, and do not speak to me again! What will be done with this knowledge, I cannot say. Perhaps it will be used for the exposure which will drive you from the houses of honest people. Go, I say!'

She stamped her foot and raised her voice, insomuch that two drowsy attendants woke up and looked round, thinking they had dreamed something unusual.

The injured man of Art and Letters obeyed. He strode away. He, who had come pale and hesitating, now, on learning the truth which he had suspected and on receiving this unmistakable rejection, walked away with head erect and lofty mien. He showed, at least by outward bearing, the courage which is awakened by a declaration of war.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONGRATULATIONS

In the afternoon of the same day Armore received a visit from a certain Lady Frances, of whom mention has already been made. She was sitting in her own room, alone. The excitements of the last night and of the morning were succeeded by a gentle melancholy. These things had not been expected when she took her rooms and plunged into London life. Besides, after these excitements the afternoon was flat.

Lady Frances came in, dressed beautifully, gracious and cordial; she took both Armorel's hands in her own, and looked as if she would have kissed her but for conscientious scruples: she was five-and-forty, or perhaps fifty, fat, comfortable, and rosy-cheeked. And she

began to talk volubly. Not in the common and breathless way of volubility which leaves out the stops: but steadily and irresistibly, so that her companion should not be able to get in one single word. Well-bred persons do not leave out their commas and their full stops: but they do sometimes talk continuously, like a cataract or a Westmoreland Force, at least.

'My dear,' she said, 'I told your maid that I wanted to see you alone, and in your own room. She said Mrs. Elstree was out. So I came in. It is a very pretty little room. They tell me you play wonderfully. This is where you practise, I suppose.' She put up her glasses and looked round, as if to see what impression had been produced on the walls by the music. 'And I hear also that you paint and draw. My dear, you are the very person for him.' Again she looked round. 'A very pretty room, really—wonderful to observe how the taste for decoration and domestic art has spread of late years!' A doubtful compliment, when you consider it.

'Well, my dear, as an old friend of his—at all events, a very useful friend of his—I am come to congratulate you.'

'To congratulate me?'

'Yes. I thought I would be one of the first. I asked him two or three days ago if it was settled, and he confessed the truth, but begged me not to spread it abroad, because there were lawyers and people to see. Of course, his secrets are mine. And, except my own very intimate friends and one or two who can be perfectly trusted, I don't think I have mentioned the thing to a soul. I dare say, however, the news is all over the town by this time. Wonderful how things get carried—a bird of the air—the flying thistle-down——'

'I do not understand, Lady Frances.'

'My dear, you need not pretend, because he confessed. And I think you are a very lucky girl to catch the cleverest man in all London, and he certainly is a lucky man to catch such a pretty girl as you. They say that he has got through all his money—men

of genius are always bad men of business—but your own fortune will set him up again—a hundred thousand, I am told—mind you have it all settled on yourself. No one knows what may happen. I could tell you a heart-rending story of a girl who trusted her lover with her money. But your lawyers will, of course, look after that.'

'I assure you——'

'He tells me,' the lady went on, without taking any notice of the interruption, 'that the thing will not come off for some time yet. I wouldn't keep it waiting too long, if I were you. Engagements easily get stale. Like buns. Well, I suppose you have learned all his secrets by this time: of course he is madly in love, and can keep nothing from you.'

'Indeed——'

'Has he told you yet who writes his stories for him? Eh? Has he told you that?' The lady bent forward and lowered her voice, and spoke earnestly. 'Has he told you?'

'I assure you that he has told me nothing—and——'

'That is in reality what I came about. Because, my dear, there must be a little plain speaking.'

'Oh! but let me speak—I——'

'When I have said what I came to say'—Lady Frances motioned with her hand gently but with authority—'then you shall have your turn. Men are so foolish that they tell their sweethearts everything. The chief reason why they fall in love, I believe, is a burning desire to have somebody to whom they can tell everything. I know a man who drove his wife mad by constantly telling her all his difficulties. He was always swimming in difficulties. Well, Alec is bound to tell you before long, even if he has not told you yet, which I can hardly believe. Now, my dear child, it matters very little to him if all the world knew the truth. All the world, to be sure, credits him with those stories, though he has been very careful not to claim them. He knows better. I say to such a clever man as Alec a few stories, more or less, matter nothing. But it matters a great deal to me'

—what was this person talking about?—'because, you see, if it were to come out that I had been putting together old family scandals and forgotten stories, and sending them to the papers—there would be—there would be—Heaven knows what there would be! Yes, my dear—you can tell Alec that you know—I am the person who has written those stories. I wrote them, every one. They are all family stories—every good old family has got thousands of stories, and I have been collecting them—some of my own people, some of my husband's, and some of other people—and writing them down, changing names, and scenes, and dates, so that they should not be identified except by the few who knew them.'

Armorel made no further attempt to stem the tide of communication.

'I have come to make you understand clearly, young lady, that it is not his secret alone, but mine. You would do him a little harm, perhaps—I don't know—by letting it out, but you would do me an infinity of harm. I write them down, you see, and I take them to

Alec, and he alters them—puts the style right —or says he does—though I never see any difference in them when they come out in the paper. And everybody who knows the story asks how in the name of wonder he got it.'

'Oh! But I do assure you that I know nothing at all of this.'

'Don't you? Well, never mind. Now you do know. And you know also that you can't talk about it, because it is his secret as well as mine. Why, you don't suppose that the man really does all he says he does, do you? Nobody could. It isn't in nature. Everybody who knows anything at all agrees that there must be a ghost—perhaps more than one. I'm the story ghost. I dare say there's a picture ghost, and a poetry ghost. He's a wonderful clever man, no doubt—it's the cleverest thing in the world to make other people work for you; but don't imagine, pray, that he can write stories of society. Bourgeois stories—about the middle class—his own class—perhaps; but not stories about Us. My stories belong to quite another level.

Well, my dear, that is off my mind. Remember that this secret would do a great deal of harm to him as well as to me if it were to get about.'

'Oh! You are altogether—wholly—wrong——'

'My dear, I really do not care if I am wrong. You will not, however, damage his reputation by letting out his secrets? A wife can help her husband in a thousand ways, and especially in keeping up the little deceptions. Thousands of wives, I am told, pass their whole lives in the pretence that they and their husbands are gentlefolk. Alec has been received into a few good houses; and though it is, of course, more difficult to get a woman in than a man, I will really do what I can for you. With a good face, good eyes, a good figure, and a little addition of style, you ought to get on very well by degrees. Or you might take the town by storm, and become a professional beauty.'

'Thank you—but——'

'And there's another thing. As an old

friend of Alec's, I feel that I can give advice to you. Let me advise you earnestly, my dear, to make all the haste you can to get rid of your companion. I know all about it. She was sent to your lawyer's by Alec himself. Why? Well, it is an old story, and I suppose he wanted to place her comfortably—or he had some other reason. He's always been a crafty man. You can see that in his eyes.'

'Oh! But I cannot listen to this!' cried Armorel.

'Nonsense, my dear. You do not expect your husband to be an angel, I suppose. Only silly middle-class girls who read novels do that. It will do you no harm to know that the man is no better than his neighbours. And I am sure he is no worse. I am speaking, in fact, for your own good. My dear child, Alec ran after the woman years ago. She was rich then, and used to go about. Certain houses do not mind who enter within their gates. They lived in Palace Gardens, and Monsieur le Papa was rich—oh! rich *à millions*—and the daughter was sugar-sweet

and as innocent as an angel—fluffy hair, all tangled and rebellious—you know the kind—and large blue, wondering eyes, generally lowered until the time came for lifting them in the faces of young men. It was deadly, my dear. I believe she might have married anybody she pleased. There was the young Earl of Silchester—he wanted her. What a fool she was not to take him! No; she was spoony on Alec Feilding——'

'Oh! I must not!' cried Armorel again.

'My dear, I'm telling you. Her papa went smash—poor thing!—a grand, awful, impossible smash: other people's money mixed up in it. A dozen workhouses were filled with the victims, I believe. That kind of smash out of which it is impossible to pull yourself anyhow. Killed himself, therefore. Went out of the world without invitation by means of a coarse, vulgar, common piece of twopenny rope, tied round his great fat neck. I remember him. What did the girl do? Ran away from society: went on the stage as one of a travelling company. Why, I saw her

myself three years ago at Leamington. I knew her instantly. "Aha!" I said, "there's Miss Fluffy, with the appealing, wondering eyes. Poor thing! Here is a come down in the world!" Now I find her here—your companion—a widow—widow of one Jerome Elstree deceased—artist, I am told. I never heard of the gentleman, and I confess I have my doubts as to his existence at all.'

Armorel ceased to offer any further opposition to the stream.

'The innocent, appealing blue eyes: the childish face: oh! I remember. My dear, I hope you will not have any reason to be jealous of Mrs. Elstree. But take care. There were other girls, too, now I come to think about it. There was his cousin, Philippa Rosevean. Everybody knows that he went as far with her as a man can go, short of an actual engagement. Canon Langley, of St. Paul's, wants to marry her. She's an admirable person for an ecclesiastical dignitary's wife—beautiful, cold, and dignified. But, as yet, she has not accepted him.

They say he will be a Bishop. And they say she loves her cousin Alec still. Women are generally dreadful fools about men. But I don't know. I don't think, if I were you, I should be jealous of Philippa. There's another little girl, too, I have seen coming out of his studio. But she's only a model, or something. If you begin to be jealous about the models, there will be no end. Then, there are hundreds of girls about town—especially those who can draw and paint a little, or write a silly little song—who think they are greatly endowed with genius, and would give their heads to get your chance. You are a lucky girl, Miss Armorel Rosevean; but I would advise you, in order to make the most of your good fortune, to change your companion quickly. Persuade her to try the climate of Australia. Else, there may be family jars.'

Here she stopped. She had said what was in her mind. Whether she came to say this out of the goodness of her heart; or whether she intended to make a little mis-

chief between the girl and her lover; or whether she supposed Armorel to be a young lady who accepts a lover with no illusions as to imaginary perfections, so that a new weakness discovered here and there would not lower him in her opinion, I cannot say. Lady Frances was generally considered a good-natured kind of person, and certainly she had no illusions about perfection in any man.

'May I speak now?' asked Armorel.

'Certainly, my dear. It was very good of you to hear me patiently. And I've said all I wanted to. Keep my secret, and get rid of your companion, and I'll take you in hand.'

'Thank you. But you would not suffer me to explain that you are entirely mistaken. I am not engaged to Mr. Feilding at all.'

'But he told me that you were.'

'Yes; but he also tells the world, or allows the world to believe, that he writes your stories. I am not engaged to Mr. Feilding, Lady Frances, and, what is more,

I never shall be engaged to that man—never!'

'Have you quarrelled already?'

'We have not quarrelled, because before people quarrel they must be on terms of some intimacy. We have never been more than acquaintances.'

'Well—but—child—he has been seen with you constantly. At theatres, at concerts, in the park, in galleries—everywhere, he has been walking with you as if he had the right.'

'I could not help that. Besides, I never thought——'

'Never thought? Why, where were you brought up? Never thought? Good gracious! what do young ladies go into society for?'

'I am not a young lady of society, I am afraid.'

'Well—but—what was your companion about, to allow—— Oh!'—Lady Frances nodded her head—'oh! now I understand. Now one can understand why he got her placed here. Now one understands her busi-

ness. My dear, you have been placed in a very dangerous position—most dangerous. Your guardians or lawyers are very much to blame. And you really never suspected anything?'

'How should I suspect? I was always told that Mr. Feilding was not the man to begin that kind of thing.'

'Were you? Your companion told you that, I suppose?'

'Oh! I suppose so. There seems a horrid network of deception all about me, Lady Frances.' Armorel rose, and her visitor followed her example. 'You have put a secret into my hands. I shall respect it. Henceforth, I desire but one more interview with this man. Oh! he is all lies—through and through. There is no part of him that is true.'

'Nonsense, my dear; you take things too seriously. We all have our little reservations, and some deceptions are necessary. When you get to my age you will understand. Why won't you marry the man? He is

young: his manners are pretty good: he is a man of the world: he is really clever: he is quite sure to get on, particularly if his wife help him. He means to get on. He is the kind of man to get on. You see he is clever enough to take the credit of other people's work: to make others work for you is the first rule in the art of getting on. Oh! he will do. I shall live to see him made a baronet, and in the next generation his son will marry money, and go up into the Lords. That is the way. My dear, you had better take him. You will never get a more promising offer. You seem to me rather an unworldly kind of girl. You should really take advice of those who know the world.'

'I could never — never — marry Mr. Feilding.'

'Wealth, position, society, rank, consideration—these are the only things in life worth having, and you are going to throw them away! My dear, is there actually nothing between you at all? Was it all a fib?'

'Actually nothing at all, except that he

offered himself to me this very morning, and he received an answer which was, I hope, plain enough.'

'Ah! now I see.' Lady Frances laughed. 'Now I understand, my dear, the vanity of the man! The creature, when he told me that fib, thought it was the truth because he had made up his mind to ask you, and, of course, he concluded that no one could say "No" to him. Now I understand. You need not fall into a rage about it, my dear. It was only his vanity. Poor dear Alec! Well, he'll get another pretty girl, I dare say; but, my dear, I doubt whether—— Rising men are scarce, you know. Good-bye, child! Keep that little secret, and don't bear malice. The vanity—the vanity of the men! Wonderful! wonderful!'

'And now,' cried Armorel, alone—'now there is nothing left. Everything has been torn from him. He can do nothing—nothing. The cleverest man—the very cleverest man in all London!'

CHAPTER XIX

WHAT NEXT?

Roland had moved into his new studio before Armorel became, as she had promised, his model in the new picture. She began to go there nearly every morning, accompanied by Effie, and faithfully sat for two or three hours while the painting went on. It was the picture which he had begun under the old conditions, her own figure being substituted for that of the girl which the artist originally designed. The studio was one of a nest of such offices crowded together under a great roof and lying on many floors. The others were, I dare say, prettily furnished and decorated with the customary furniture of a studio, with pictures, sketches, screens, and pretty things of all kinds. This studio was

nothing but a great gaunt room, with a big window, and no furniture in it except an easel, a table, and two or three chairs. There was simply nothing else. Under the pressure of want and failure the unfortunate artist had long ago parted with all the pretty things with which he had begun his career, and the present was no time to replace them.

'I have got the studio,' he said, 'for the remainder of a lease, pretty cheap. Unfortunately, I cannot furnish it yet. Wait until the tide turns. I am full of hope. Then this arid wall and this great staring Sahara of a floor shall blossom with all manner of lovely things—armour and weapons, bits of carving and tapestry, drawings. You shall see how jolly it will be.'

Next to the studio there were two rooms. In one of these, his bed-room, he had placed the barest necessaries; the other was empty and unfurnished, so that he had no place to sit in during the evening but his gaunt and ghostly studio. However, the tide had turned in one respect. He was now full of hope.

There is no better time for conversation than when one is sitting for a portrait or standing for a model. The subject has to remain motionless. This would be irksome if silence were imposed as well as inaction. Happily, the painter finds that his sitter only exhibits a natural expression when he or she is talking and thinking about something else. And, which is certainly a Providential arrangement, the painter alone among mortals, if we except the cobbler, can talk and work at the same time. I do not mean that he can talk about the Differential Calculus, or about the relations of Capital and Labour, or about a hot corner in politics : but he can talk of things light, pleasant, and on the surface.

'I feel myself back in Scilly,' said Armorel. 'Whenever I come here and think of what you are painting, I am in the boat, watching the race of the tide through the channel. The puffins are swarming on Camber Rock, and swimming in the smooth water outside : there is the head of a seal, black above

the water, shining in the sunlight—how he flounders in the current! The seagulls are flying and crying overhead: the shags stand in rows upon the farthest rocks: the sea-breeze blows upon my cheek. I suppose I have changed so much that when I go back I shall have lost the old feeling. But it was joy enough in those days only to sit in the boat and watch it all. Do you remember, Roland?'

'I remember very well. You are not changed a bit, Armorel: you have only grown larger and ——' 'More beautiful,' he would have added, but refrained. 'You will find that the old joy will return again—*la joie de vivre*—only to breathe and feel and look around. But it will be then ten times as joyous. If you loved Scilly when you were a child and had seen nothing else, how much more will you love the place now that you have travelled and seen strange lands and other coasts and the islands of the Mediterranean!'

'I fear that I shall find the place small:

the house will have shrunk—children's houses always shrink. I hope that Holy Farm will not have become mean.'

'Mean? with the verbena-trees, the fuchsias, the tall pampas-grass, and the palms! Mean? with the old ship's lanthorn and the gilded figure-head? Mean, Armorel? with the old orchard behind and the twisted trees with their fringe of grey moss? You talk rank blasphemy! Something dreadful will happen to you.'

'Perhaps it will be I myself, then, that will have grown mean enough to think the old house mean. But Samson is a very little place, isn't it? One cannot make out Samson to be a big place. I could no longer live there always. We will go there for three or four months every year; just for refreshment of the soul, and then return here among men and women or travel abroad together, Effie. We could be happy for a time there: we could sail and row about the rocks in calm weather: and in stormy weather we should watch the waves breaking over the headlands,

and in the evening I would play "The Chirping of the Lark."'

'I am ready to go to-morrow, if you will take me with you,' said Effie.

Then they were silent again. Roland walked backwards and forwards, brush and palette in hand, looking at his model and at his canvas. Effie stood beside the picture, watching it grow. To one who cannot paint, the growth of a portrait on the canvas is a kind of magic. The bare outline and shape of head and face, the colour of the eyes, the curve of the neck, the lines of the lips—anyone might draw these. But to transfer to the canvas the very soul that lies beneath the features—that, if you please, is different. Oh! How does the painter catch the soul of the man and show it in his face? One must be oneself an artist of some kind even to appreciate the greatness of the portrait painter.

'When this picture is finished,' said Armorel, 'there will be nothing to keep me in London; and we will go then.'

'At the very beginning of the season?'

'The season is nothing to me. My companion, Mrs. Elstree, who was to have launched me so beautifully into the very best society, turns out not to have any friends; so that there is no society for me, after all. Perhaps it is as well.'

'Will Mrs. Elstree go to Scilly with you?' asked Roland.

'No,' said Armorel, with decision. 'On Samson, at least, one needs no companion.'

Again they relapsed into silence for a space. Conversation in the studio is fitful.

'I have a thing to talk over with you two,' she said. 'First, I thought it would be best to talk about it to you singly; but now I think that you should both hear the whole story, and so we can all three take counsel as to what is best.'

'Your head a little more—so.' Roland indicated the movement with his forefinger. 'That will do. Now pray go on, Armorel.'

'Once there was a man,' she began, as if she was telling a story to children—and,

indeed, there is no better way ever found out of beginning a story—'a man who was, in no sense at all, and could never become, try as much as he could, an artist. He was, in fact, entirely devoid of the artistic faculty: he had no ear for music or for poetry, no eye for beauty of form or for colour, no hand for drawing, no brain to conceive: he was quite a prosaic person. Whether he was clever in things that do not require the artistic faculty, I do not know. I should hardly think he could be clever in anything. Perhaps he might be good at buying cheap and selling dear.'

'Won't you take five minutes' rest?' asked the painter; hardly listening at all to the beginning, which, as you see, promised very little in the way of amusement. There are, however, many ways by which the story-teller gets a grip of his hearer, and a dull beginning is not always the least effective. He put down his palette. 'You must be tired,' he said. 'Come and tell me what you think.' He looked thoughtfully at his picture.

Armorel's poor little beginning of a story was slighted.

'You are satisfied, so far?' she asked.

'I will tell you when it is finished. Is the water quite right?'

'We are in shoal, close behind us are the broad Black Rock Ledges. The water might be even more transparent still. It is the dark water racing through the narrow ravine that I think of most. It will be a great picture, Roland. Now I will take my place again.' She did so. 'And, with your permission, I will go on with my story: you heard the beginning, Roland?'

'Oh! Yes! Unfortunate man with no eyes and no ears,' he replied, unsuspecting. 'Worse than a one-eyed Calender.'

'This preposterous person, then, with neither eye, nor ear, nor hand, nor understanding, had the absurd ambition to succeed. This you will hardly believe. But he did. And, what is more, he had no patience, but wanted to succeed all at once. I am told that lots of young men, nowadays, are con-

sumed with that yearning to succeed all at once. It seems such a pity, when they should be happily dancing and singing and playing at the time when they were not working. I think they would succeed so very much better afterwards. Well, this person very soon found that in the law—did I say he was a barrister?—he had no chance of success except after long years. Then he looked round the fields of art and literature. Mind, he could neither write nor practise any art. What was he to do? Every day the ambition to seem great filled his soul more and more, and every day the thing appeared to him more hopeless: because, you see, he had no imagination, and therefore could not send his soul to sleep with illusions. I wonder he did not go mad. Perhaps he did, for he resolved to pretend. First, he thought he would pretend to be a painter'—here Roland, who had been listening languidly, started, and became attentive. 'He could neither paint nor draw, remember. He began, I think, by learning

the language of Art. He frequented studios, heard the talk and read the books. It must have been weary work for him. But, of course, he was no nearer his object than before: and then a great chance came to him. He found a young artist full of promise —a real artist—one filled with the whole spirit of Art: but he was starving. He was actually penniless, and he had no friends who could help him, because he was an Australian by birth. This young man was not only penniless, but in despair. He was ready to do anything. I suppose, when one is actually starving and sees no prospect of success or any hope, ambition dies away and even self-respect may seem a foolish thing.' Roland listened now, his picture forgotten. What was Armorel intending? 'It must be a most dreadful kind of temptation. There can be nothing like it in the world. That is why we pray for our daily bread. Oh! a terrible temptation. I never understood before how great and terrible a temptation it is. Then the man without eye, or hand, or

brain saw a chance for himself. He would profit by his brother's weakness. He proposed to buy the work of this painter and to call it his own.'

'Armorel, must you tell this story?'

'Patience, Roland. In his despair the artist gave way. He consented. For three years and more he received the wages of—of sin. But his food was like ashes in his mouth, and his front was stamped—yes, stamped—by the curse of those who sin against their own soul.'

'Armorel——' But she went on, ruthless.

'The pictures were very good: they were exhibited, praised, and sold. And the man grew quickly in reputation. But he wasn't satisfied. He thought that as it was so easy to be a painter, it would be equally easy to become a poet. All the Arts are allied: many painters have been also poets. He had never written a single line of poetry. I do not know that he had ever read any. He found a girl who was struggling, working, and hoping.' Effie started and turned roseate

red. 'He took her poems—bought them—and, on the pretence of having improved them and so made them his own, he published them in his own name. They were pretty, bright verses, and presently people began to look for them and to like them. So he got a double reputation. But the poor girl remained unknown. At first she was so pleased at seeing her verses in print—it looked so much like success—that she hardly minded seeing his name at the end. But presently he brought out a little volume of them with his name on the title-page, and then a second volume—also with his name——'

'The scoundrel!' cried Roland. 'He cribbed his poetry too?'

Effie bowed her face, ashamed.

'And then the girl grew unhappy. For she perceived that she was in a bondage from which there was no escape except by sacrificing the money which he gave her, and that was necessary for her brother's sake. So she became very unhappy.'

'Very unhappy,' echoed Effie. Both painter and poet stood confused and ashamed.

'Then this clever man—the cleverest man in London—began to go about in society a good deal, because he was so great a genius. There he met a lady who was full of stories.'

'Oh!' said Roland. 'Is there nothing in him at all?'

'Nothing at all. There is really nothing at all. This man persuaded the lady to write down these stories, which were all based on old family scandals and episodes unknown or forgotten by the world. They form a most charming series of stories. I believe they are written in a most sparkling style—full of wit and life. Well, he did not put his name to them, but he allowed the whole world to believe that they were his own.'

'Good Heavens!' cried Roland.

'And still he was not satisfied. He found a young dramatist who had written a most charming play. He tried to persuade the poor lad that his play was worthless, and he

offered to take it himself, alter it—but there needed no alteration—and convert it into a play that could be acted. He would give fifty pounds for the play, but it was to be his own.'

'Yes,' said Effie, savagely. 'He made that offer, but he will not get the play.'

'You have heard, now, what manner of man he was. Very well. I tell you two the story because I want to consult you. The other day I arranged a little play of my own. That is, I invited people to hear the reciting of that drama: I invited the pretender himself among the rest, but he did not know or guess what the play was going to be. And at the same time I invited the painter and the poet. The former brought his unfinished picture—the latter brought her latest poem, which the pretender was going that very week to bring out in his own name. I had set it to music, and I sang it I meant that he should learn in this way, without being told, that everything was discovered. I watched his face during the

recital of the play, and I saw the dismay of the discovery creeping gradually over him as he realised that he had lost his painter, his poet, and his dramatist. There remained nothing more but to discover the author of the stories—and that, too, I have found out. And I think he will lose his story-teller as well. He will be deprived of all his borrowed plumes. At one blow he saw himself ruined.'

Neither of the two made answer for a space. Then spoke Roland: 'Dux femina facti! A woman hath done this.'

'He is ruined unless he can find others to take your places. The question I want you to consider is—What shall be done next? Roland, it is your name and fame that he has stolen—your pictures that he has called his own. Effie, they are your poems that he has published under his name. What will you do? Will you demand your own again? Think.'

'He must exhibit no more pictures of mine,' said Roland. 'He has one in his studio

that he has already sold. That one must not go to any gallery. That is all I have to say.'

'He cannot publish any more poems of mine,' said Effie, 'because he hasn't got any, and I shall give him no more.'

'What about the past?'

'Are we so proud of the past and of the part we have played in it'—asked Roland—'that we should desire its story published to all the world?'

Effie shook her head, approvingly.

'As for me,' he continued, 'I wish never to hear of it again. It makes me sick and ashamed even to think of it. Let it be forgotten. I was an unknown artist—I had few friends—I had exhibited one picture only—so that my work was unknown—I had painted for him six or seven pictures which are mostly bought by an American. As for the resemblance of style, that may make a few men talk for a season. Then it will be forgotten. I shall rémain—he will have disappeared. I am content to take my chance with future

work, even if at first I may appear to be a mere copyist of Mr. Alec Feilding.'

'And you, Effie?'

'I agree with Mr. Lee,' she replied briefly. 'Let the past alone. I shall write more verses, and, perhaps, better verses.'

'Then I will go to him and tell him that he need fear nothing. We shall hold our tongues. But he is not to exhibit the picture that is in his studio. I will tell him that.'

'You will not actually go to him yourself, Armorel—alone—after what has passed?' asked Effie.

'Why not? He can do me no harm. He knows that he has been found out, and he is tormented by the fear of what we shall do next. I bring him relief. His reputation is secure—that is to say, it will be the reputation of a man who stopped at thirty, in the fulness of his first promise and his best powers, and did no more work.'

'Oh!' cried Effie. 'I thought he was so clever! I thought that his desire to be thought a poet was only a little infirmity of

temper, which would pass. And, after all, to think that——' Here the poet looked at the painter, and the painter looked at the poet—but neither spoke the thought: 'How could you—you, with your pencil: how could you—you, with your pen—consent to the iniquity of so great a fraud?'

CHAPTER XX

A RECOVERY AND A FLIGHT

Amid all these excitements Armorel became aware that something—something of a painful and disagreeable character, was going on with her companion. They were at this time very little together. Mrs. Elstree took her breakfast in bed; at luncheon she was, just now, nearly always out; at dinner she sat silent, pale, and anxious; in the evening she lay back in her chair as if she was asleep. One night Armorel heard her weeping and sobbing in her room. She knocked at the door with intent to offer her help if she was ill. 'No, no,' cried Mrs. Elstree; 'you need not come in. I have nothing but a headache.'

This thing as well disquieted her. She

remembered what Lady Frances had suggested —it is always the suggestion rather than the bare fact which sticks and pricks like a thorn, and will not come out or suffer itself to be removed. Armorel thought nothing of the allegation concerning the stage—why should not a girl go upon the stage if she wished? The suggestion which pricked was that Mrs. Elstree had been sent to her by the man whom she now knew to be fraudulent through and through, in order to carry out some underhand and secret design. There is nothing more horrid than the suspicion that the people about one are treacherous. It reduces one to the condition of primitive man, for whom every grassy glade concealed a snake and every bush a wild beast. She tried to shake off the suspicion, yet a hundred things confirmed it. Her constant praise of this child of genius, his persistence in meeting them wherever they went, the attempt to make her find money for his schemes. The girl, thus irritated, began to have uneasy dreams; she was as one caught in the

meshes; she was lured into a garden whence there was no escape; she was hunted by a cunning and relentless creature; she was in a prison, and could not get out. Always in her dreams Zoe stood on one side of her, crying, 'Oh, the great and glorious creature! —oh, the cleverness of the man!—oh, the wonder and the marvel of him!' And on the other side stood Lady Frances, saying, 'Why don't you take him? He is a liar, it is true, but he is no worse than his neighbours—all men are liars! You can't get a man made on purpose for you. What is your business in life at all but to find a husband? Why are girls in Society at all except to catch husbands? And they are scarce, I assure you. Why don't you take the man? You will never again have such a chance—a rising man—a man who can make other people work for him—a clever man. Besides, you are as good as engaged to him: you have made people talk: you have been seen with him everywhere. If you are not engaged to him you ought to be.'

It was about a week after the reading of the play when this condition of suspicion and unquiet was brought to an end in a very unexpected manner.

Mr. Jagenal called at the rooms in the morning about ten o'clock. Mrs. Elstree was taking breakfast in bed, as usual. Armorel was alone, painting.

'My dear young lady,' said her kindly adviser, 'I would not have disturbed you at this early hour but for a very important matter. You are well and happy, I trust? No, you are not well and happy. You look pale.'

'I have been a little worried lately,' Armorel replied. 'But never mind now.'

'Are you quite alone here? Your companion, Mrs. Elstree?'

'She has not yet left her room. We are quite alone.'

'Very well, then.' The lawyer sat down and began nursing his right knee. 'Very well. You remember, I dare say, making a certain communication to me touching a

collection of precious stones in your possession? You made that communication to me five years ago, when first you came from Scilly. You returned to it again when you arrived at your twenty-first birthday, and I handed over to your own keeping all your portable property.'

'Of course I remember perfectly well.'

'Then does your purpose still hold?'

'It is still, and always, my duty to hand over those rubies to their rightful owner—the heir of Robert Fletcher, as soon as he can be found.'

'It is also my duty to warn you again, as I have done already, that there is no reason at all why you should do so. You are the sole heiress of your great-great-grandmother's estate. She died worth a great sum of money in gold, besides treasures in plate, works of art, lace, and jewels cut and uncut. The rambling story of an aged woman cannot be received as evidence on the strength of which you should hand over valuable property to

persons unknown, who do not even claim it, and know nothing about it.'

'I must hand over those rubies,' Armorel repeated, 'to the person to whom they belong.'

'It is a very valuable property. If the estimate which was made for me was correct —I see no reason to doubt it—those jewels could be sold, separately, or in small parcels, for nearly thirty-five thousand pounds—a fortune larger than all the rest of your property put together—thirty-five thousand pounds!'

'That has nothing to do with the question, has it? I have got to restore those jewels, you see, to their rightful owner, as soon as he can be discovered.'

'Well—but—consider again. What have you got to go upon? The story about Robert Fletcher may or may not be true. No one can tell after this lapse of time. The things were found by you lying in the old sea-chest with other things—all your own. Who was this Robert Fletcher? Where are his heirs?

If they claim the property, and can prove their claim, give it up at once. If not, keep your own. The jewels are undoubtedly your own as much as the lace and the silks and the silver cups, which were all, I take it, recovered from wrecks.'

'Do you disbelieve my great-great-grandmother's story, then?'

'I have neither to believe nor to disbelieve. I say it isn't evidence. Your report of what she said, being then in her dotage, amounts to just nothing, considered as evidence.'

'I am perfectly certain that the story is true. The leathern thong by which the case hung round the man's neck has been cut by a knife, just as Granny described it in her story. And there is the writing in the case itself. Nothing will persuade me that the story is anything but true in every particular.'

'It may be true. I cannot say. At the same time, the property is your own, and you would be perfectly justified in keeping it.'

'Mr. Jagenal'—Armorel turned upon him sharply—'you have found out Robert Fletcher's heir! I am certain you have. That is the reason why you are here this morning.'

Mr. Jagenal laid upon the table a pocket-book full of papers.

'I will tell you what I have discovered. That is why I came here. There has been, unfortunately, a good deal of trouble in discovering this Robert Fletcher and in identifying one of the Robert Fletchers we did discover with your man. We discovered, in fact, ten Robert Fletchers before we came to the man who may reasonably be supposed—— But you shall see.'

He opened the pocket-book, and found a paper of memoranda from which he read his narrative:—

'There was one Robert Fletcher, the eleventh whom we unearthed. This man promised nothing at first. He became a broker in the City in the year 1810. In the same year he married a cousin, daughter of

another broker, with whom he entered into partnership. He did so well that when he died, in the year 1846, then aged sixty-nine, his will was proved under 80,000*l*. He left three daughters, among whom the estate was divided, in equal shares. The eldest of the daughters, Eleanor, remained unmarried, and died two years ago, at the age of seventy-seven, leaving the whole of her fortune—greatly increased by accumulations—to hospitals and charities. I believe she was, in early life, alienated from her family, on account of some real or fancied slight. However, she died: and her papers came into the hands of my friends Denham, Mansfield, Westbury, and Co., of New Square, Lincoln's Inn, solicitors. Her second sister, Frances, born in the year 1813, married in 1834, had one son, Francis Alexander, who was born in 1835, and married in 1857. Both Frances and her son are now dead; but one son remained, Frederick Alexander, born in the year 1859. The third daughter, Catharine, born in the year 1815, married in 1835, and

emigrated to Australia with her husband, a man named Temple. I have no knowledge of this branch of the family.'

'Then,' said Armorel, 'I suppose the eldest son or grandson of the second sister must have the rubies?'

'You are really in a mighty hurry to get rid of your property. The next question—it should have come earlier—is—How do I connect this Robert Fletcher with your Robert Fletcher? How do we know that Robert Fletcher the broker was Robert Fletcher the shipwrecked passenger? Well: Eleanor, the eldest, left a bundle of family papers and letters behind her. Among them is a packet endorsed "From my son Robert in India." Those letters, signed "Robert Fletcher," are partly dated from Burmah, whither the writer had gone on business. He gives his observations on the manners and customs of the country, then little known or visited. He says that he is doing very well, indeed: so well, he says presently, that, thanks to a gift made to him by the King, he

is able to think about returning home with the means of staying at home and doing no more work for the end of his natural days.'

'Of course, he had those jewels.'

'Then he writes from Calcutta. He has returned in safety from Burmah and the King, whose capricious temper had made him tremble for his life. He is putting his affairs in order: he has brought his property from Burmah in a portable form which he can best realise in London: lastly, he is going to sail in a few weeks. This is in the year 1808. According to your story it was somewhere about that date that the wreck took place on the Scilly Isles, and he was washed ashore, saved——'

'And robbed,' said Armorel.

'As we have no evidence of the fact,' answered the man of law, 'I prefer to say that the real story ends with the last of the letters. It remained, however, to compare the handwriting of the letters with that of the fragment of writing in your leather case. I took the liberty to have a photograph

made of that fragment while it was in my possession, and I now ask you to compare the handwriting.' He drew out of his pocket-book a letter—one of the good old kind, on large paper, brown with age, and unprovided with any envelope—and the photograph of which he was speaking. 'There,' he said, 'judge for yourself.'

'Why!' cried Armorel. 'The writing corresponds exactly!'

'It certainly does, letter for letter. Well; the conclusion of the whole matter is that I believe the story of the old lady to be correct in the main. On the other hand, there is nothing in the papers to show the existence in the family of any recollection of so great a loss. One would imagine that a man who had dropped—or thought he had dropped—a bag, full of rubies, worth thirty-five thousand pounds, into the sea would have told his children about it, and bemoaned the loss all his life. Perhaps, however, he was so philosophic as to grieve no more after what was hopelessly gone. He was still in the years of

hope when the misfortune befell him. Possibly his children knew in general terms that the shipwreck had caused a destruction of property. Again, a man of the City, with the instincts of the City, would not like it to be known that he had returned to his native country a pauper, while it would help him in his business to be considered somewhat of a Nabob. Of this I cannot speak from any knowledge I have, or from any discovery that I have made.'

'Oh!' cried Armorel, 'I cannot tell you what a weight has been lifted from me. I have never ceased to long for the restoration of those jewels ever since I found them in the sea-chest.'

'There is—as I said—only one descendant of the second sister—a man—a man still young. You will give me your instructions in writing. I am to hand over to this young man—this fortunate young man—already trebly fortunate in another sense—this precious packet of jewels. It is still, I suppose in the bank?'

'It is where you placed it for me when I came of age.'

'Very well. I have brought you an order for its delivery to me. Will you sign it?'

Armorel heaved a great sigh. 'With what relief!' she said. 'Have you got it here?'

Mr. Jagenal gave her the order on the bank for the delivery of sealed packet, numbered III., to himself. She signed it.

'To think,' she said, 'that by a simple stroke of the pen I can remove the curse of those ill-gotten rubies! It is like getting rid of all your sins at once. It is like Christian dropping his bundle.'

'I hope the rubies will not carry on this supposed curse of yours.'

'Oh!' cried Armorel, with a profound sigh, 'I feel as if the poor old lady was present listening. Since I could understand anything, I have understood that the possession of those rubies brought disaster upon my people. From generation to generation

they have been drowned one after the other —my father—my grandfather—my great-grandfather—my mother—my brothers—all —all drowned. Can you wonder if I rejoice that the things will threaten me no longer?'

'This is sheer superstition.'

'Oh! yes: I know, and yet I cannot choose but to believe it, I have heard the story so often, and always with the same ending. Now, they are gone.'

'Not quite gone. Nearly. As good as gone, however. Dismiss this superstitious dread from your mind, my dear young lady.'

'The rubies are gone. There will be no more of us swallowed up in the cruel sea.'

'No more of you,' repeated Mr. Jagenal, with the incredulous smile of one who has never had in his family a ghost, or a legend, or a curse, or a doom, or a banshee, or anything at all distinguished. 'And now you will be happy. You don't ask me the name of the fortunate young man.'

'No; I do not want to know anything more about the horrid things.'

'What am I to say to him?'

'Tell him the truth.'

'I shall tell him that you discovered the rubies in an old sea-chest with other property accumulated during a great many years: that a scrap of paper with writing on it gave a clue to the owner: and that, by means of other investigation, he has been discovered: that it was next to impossible for your great-grandfather, Captain Rosevean, to have purchased these jewels: and that the presumption is that he recovered them from the wreck, and laid them in the chest, saying nothing, and that the chest was never opened until your succession to the property. That, my dear young lady, is all the story that I have to tell. And now I will go away, with congratulations to Donna Quixote in getting rid of thirty-five thousand pounds.'

An hour or two afterwards, Mrs. Elstree appeared. She glided into the room and threw herself into her chair, as if she desired to sleep again. She looked harassed and anxious.

'Zoe,' cried Armorel, 'you are surely ill. What is it? Can I do nothing for you?'

'Nothing. I only wish it was all over, or that I could go to sleep for fifty years, and wake up an old woman—in an almshouse or somewhere—all the troubles over. What a beautiful thing it must be to be old and past work, with fifteen shillings a week, say, and nothing to think about all day except to try and forget the black box! If it wasn't for the black box—I know I should see them always coming along the road with it—it must be the loveliest time.'

'Well—but—what makes you look so ill?'

'Nothing. I am not ill I am never ill. I would rather be ill than—what I am. A tearing, rending neuralgia would be a welcome change. Don't ask me any more questions, Armorel. You look radiant, for your part. Has anything happened to you?—anything good? You are one of those happy girls to whom only good things come.'

'Do you remember the story I told you—about the rubies?'

'Yes.' She turned her face to the fire. 'I remember very well.'

'I have at last—congratulate me, Zoe—I have got rid of them.'

'You have got rid of them?' Mrs. Elstree started up. 'Where are they, then?'

'Mr. Jagenal has been here. He has found a great-grandson of Robert Fletcher, who is entitled to have them. I have never been so relieved! The dreadful things are out of my hands now, and in Mr. Jagenal's. He will give them to this grandson. Zoe, what is the matter?'

Mrs. Elstree rose to her feet, and stood facing Armorel, with eyes in which wild terror was the only passion visible, and white cheeks. And, as Armorel was still speaking, she staggered, reeled, and fell forwards in a faint. Armorel caught her, and bore her to the sofa, when she presently came to herself again. But the fainting fit was followed by hysterical weeping and laughing. She knew

not what she said. She raved about somebody who had bought something. Armorel paid no heed to what she said. She lamented the hour of her birth: she had been pursued by evil all her life: she lamented the hour when she met a certain man, unnamed, who had dragged her down to his own level: and so on.

When she had calmed a little, Armorel persuaded her to lie down. It is a woman's chief medicine. It is better than all the drugs in the museum of the College of Physicians. Mrs. Elstree, pale and trembling, tearful and agitated, lay down. Armorel covered her with a warm wrapper, and left her.

A little while afterwards she looked in. The patient was quite calm now, apparently asleep, and breathing gently. Armorel, satisfied with the result of her medicine, left her in charge of her maid, and went out for an hour. She went out, in fact, to tell Effie Wilmot the joyful news concerning those

abominable rubies. When she came back, in time for luncheon, she was met by her maid, who gave her a letter, and told her a strange thing. Mrs. Elstree had gone away! The sick woman, who had been raving in hysterics, hardly able to support herself to her bed, had got up the moment after Armorel left the house, packed all her boxes hurriedly, sent her for a cab, and had driven away. But she had left this note for Armorel. It was brief.

'I am obliged to go away unexpectedly. In order to avoid explanations and questions and farewells, I have thought it best to go away quietly. I could not choose but go. For certain reasons I must leave you. For the same reasons I hope that we may never meet again. I ought never to have come here. Forgive me and forget me. I will write to Mr. Jagenal to-day.

'ZOE.'

There was no reason given. She had

gone. Nor, if one may anticipate, has Armorel yet discovered the reasons for this sudden flight. Nor, as you will presently discover, will Armorel ever be able to discover those reasons.

CHAPTER XXI

ALL LOST BUT——

Mr. Alec Feilding paced the thick carpet of his studio with a restless step and an unquiet mind. Never before had he faced a more gloomy outlook. Black clouds, storm and rain, everywhere. Bad, indeed, is it for the honest tradesman when there is no money left, and no credit. But a man can always begin the world again if he has a trade. The devil of it is when a man has no trade at all, except that of lying and cheating in the abstract. Many men, it is true, combine cheatery and falsehood with their trade. Few are so unfortunate as to have no trade on which to base their frauds and adulterations.

Everything threatened, and all at once. Nay, it seemed as if everything was actually

taken from him, and all at once. Not something here, which might be repaired, and something there, a little later on, but all at once—everything. Nothing at all left. Even his furniture and his books might be seized. He would be stripped of his house, his journal, his name, his credit, his position—even his genius! Therefore his face—that face which Armorel found so wooden—was now full of expression, but of the terror-stricken, hunted kind: that of the man who has been found out and is going to be exposed.

On the table lay three or four letters. They had arrived that morning. He took them up and read them one after the other. It was line upon line, blow upon blow.

The first was from Roland Lee.

'I see no object,' he said, 'in granting you the interview which you propose. There is not really anything that requires discussion. As to our interests being identical, as you say—if they have been so hitherto they will remain so no longer. As to the market price

of the pictures, which you claim to have raised by your judicious management, I am satisfied to see my work rise to its own level by its own worth. As to your threat that the influence which has been exerted for an artist may be also exerted against him—you will do what you please. Your last demand, for gratitude, needs no reply. I start again, exactly where I was when you found me. I am still as poor and as little known. The half-dozen pictures which you have sold as your own will not help me in any way. Your assertion that I am about to reap the harvest of your labours is absurd. I begin the world over again. The last picture—the one now in your studio—you will be good enough not to exhibit.'—'Won't I, though?' asked the owner—'at the penalty of certain inconveniences which you will learn immediately. I have torn up and burned your cheque.'—'So much the better for me,' said the purchaser.—'You say that you will not let me go without a personal interview. If you insist upon one, you must have it. You will find

me here any morning. But, as you can only want an interview in the hope of renewing the old arrangement, I am bound to warn you that it is hopeless and impossible, and to beg that you will not trouble yourself to come here at all. Understand that no earthly consideration will induce me to bear any further share in the deception in which I have been too long a confederate. The guilty knowledge of the past should separate us as wide apart as the poles. To see you will be to revive a guilty memory. Since we must meet, perhaps, from time to time, let us meet as a pair of criminals who avoid each other's conversation for fear of stirring up the noisome past. What has been resolved upon, so far as I—and another—are concerned, Miss Armorel Rosevean has undertaken to inform you.—R. L.'

'Deception! Criminals!' I suppose there is no depth of wickedness into which men may not descend, step by step, getting daily deeper in the mire of falsehood and crime, yet walking always with head erect, and

meeting the world with the front of rectitude. Had anyone told Mr. Alec Feilding, years before, what he would do in the future, he would have kicked that foul and obscene prophet. Well: he had done these things, and deliberately: he had posed before the world as painter, poet, and writer of fiction. As time went on, and the world accepted his pretensions, they became a part of himself. Nay: he even excused himself. Everybody does the same thing: or, just the same, everybody would do it, given the chance: it is a world of pretension, make-believe, and seeming. Besides, he was no highwayman, he bought the things: he paid for them: they were his property. And yet—'Deception! Criminals!' The words astonished and pained him.

And the base ingratitude of the man. He was starving: no one would buy his things: nobody knew his work, when he stepped in. Then, by dexterity in the art of Puff, which the moderns call *réclame*—he actually believed this, being so ignorant of Art—he had forced

these pictures into notice: he had run up their price, until for that picture on the easel he had been offered, and had taken, 450*l.*! Ungrateful!

'Deception! Criminals!'

Why, the man had actually received a cheque for 300*l.* for that very picture. What more could he want or expect? True, he had refused to cash the cheque. More fool he!

And now he was going absolutely to withdraw from the partnership, and work for himself. Well—poor devil! He would starve!

He stood in front of the picture and looked at it mournfully. The beautiful thing—far more beautiful than any he had exhibited before. It cut him to the heart to think—not that he had been such a fraud, but—that he could have no more from the same source. His career was cut short at the outset, his ambitions blasted, by this unlucky accident. Yet a year or two and the Academy would have made him an

Associate: a few more years and he would have become R.A. Perhaps, in the end, President. And now it was all over. No Royal Academy for him, unless—a thing almost desperate—he could find some other Roland Lee—some genius as poor, as reckless of himself. And it might be years—years—before he could find such a one. Meantime, what was he to show? What was he to say? 'Deception! Criminals!' Confound the fellow! The words banged about his head and boxed his ears.

The second letter was from Effie—the girl to whom he had paid such vast sums of money, whom he had surrounded with luxuries—on whom he had bestowed the precious gift of his personal friendship. This girl also wrote without the least sense of gratitude. She said, in fact, writing straight to the point, 'I beg to inform you that I shall not, in future, be able to continue those contributions to your paper which you have thought fit to publish in two volumes with your own name attached. I have submitted

my original manuscript of those verses to a friend, who has compared them with your published volume, and has ascertained that there is not the alteration of a single word. So that your pretence of having altered and improved them, until they became your own, is absurd. My brother begs me to add that your statement made before all the people at the reading was false. You made no suggestions. You offered no advice. You said that the play was worthless. My brother has made no alterations. You offered to give him fifty pounds for the whole rights in the play, with the right of bringing it out under your own name. This offer he refuses absolutely.

'I sincerely wish I could restore the money you have given me. I now understand that it was the price of my silence—the Wages of Sin. 'E. W.'

No more verses from that quarter. Poets, however, there are in plenty, writers of glib and flowing rhymes. To be sure, they are

as a race consumed by vanity, and want to have their absurd names stuck to everything they do. Very well, henceforth he would have anonymous verses, and engage a small army of poets. The letter moved him little, except that it came by the same post as the other. It proved, taken with the evening of the play, concerted action. As for comparing the girl's manuscript verses with the volume, how was she to prove that the manuscript verses were not copied out of the volume?

Then there was a third letter, a very angry letter, from Lady Frances, his story-teller.

'I learn,' she said, 'that you have chosen me as the fittest person upon whom to practise your deceptions. You assured me that you were engaged to Miss Armorel Rosevean. I learn from the young lady herself that this is entirely false: you did offer yourself, it is true, a week after you had assured me of the engagement. You were

promptly and decidedly refused. And you had no reason whatever for believing that you would be accepted.

'I should like you to consider that you owe your introduction into society to me. You also owe to me whatever name you have acquired as a story-teller. Every one of the society stories told in your paper has been communicated to you by me. And this is the way in which you repay my kindness to you.

'Under the circumstances, I think you cannot complain if I request that in future we cease to meet even as acquaintances. Of course, my contributions to your paper will be discontinued. And if you venture to state anywhere that they are your own work, I will publicly contradict the statement.

'F. H.'

He stood irresolute. What was to be done? For the moment he could think of nothing. 'It is that cursed girl!' he cried. 'Why did she ever come here? By what

unlucky accident did she meet these two—Roland Lee and Effie? Why was I such a fool as to ask Lady Frances to call upon her? Why did I send Zoe to her? It is all folly together. If it had not been for her we should have been all going on as before. I am certain we should—and going on comfortably. I should have made Roland's fortune as well as my own name—and his hand was getting stronger and better every day. And I should have kept that girl in comfort, and made a very pretty little name for myself that way. She was improving, too—a bright and clever girl—a real treasure in proper hands. And I had the boy as well, or should have had. Good Heavens! what losses! What a splendid possession to have destroyed! No man ever before had such a chance—to say nothing of Lady Frances!' It was maddening. We use the word lightly, and for small cause. But it really was maddening. 'What will they say? What are they going to do? What can they say? If it comes to a question of affirmation I can

swear as well as anyone, I suppose. If Roland pretends that he painted my pictures —if Effie says she wrote my poems—how will they prove it? What can they do?

'But things stick. If it is whispered about that there will be no more pictures and no more poems—oh! it is the hardest luck.'

One more letter reached him by that morning's post:—

'Dearest Alec,—I have left Armorel, and am no longer a Companion. The gilt could not disguise the pill. I have, however, a communication to make of a more comfortable character than this. It is true that I am like a housemaid out of a situation. But I think you will change the natural irritation caused by this announcement for a more joyful countenance when you see me. I shall arrive with my communication about noon to-morrow. Be at home, and be alone.—Your affectionate 'Zoe.'

What had she got to say? At the present crisis what could it matter what she had to say? If she had only got that money out of Armorel, or succeeded in making the girl his servant. But she could not do the only really useful thing he ever asked of her.

He laid down the letter on the table, beside one from his printers—three days old. In this communication the printers pointed out that his account was very large; that no satisfactory arrangement had been proposed; that they were going to discontinue printing his paper unless something practical was effected; and that they hoped to hear from him without delay.

There was a knock at the door: the discreet man-servant brought a card, with the silence and confidential manner of one who announces a secret emissary—say a hired assassin.

The visitor was Mr. Jagenal. He came in friendly and expansive.

'My dear boy!' he said with a warm grasp. 'Always at work—always at work?'

Alec dexterously swept the letters into an open drawer. 'Always at work,' he said. 'But I must be hard pressed when I cannot give you five minutes. What is it?'

'I will come to the point at once. You know Mrs. Elstree very well, I believe?'

'Very well indeed—I knew her before her father's failure. Before her marriage.'

'Quite so. Then what do you make of this?' He handed over a note, which the other man read: 'Dear Sir,—Unexpected circumstances have made it necessary for me to give up my charge of Armorel Rosevean at once. I have not even been able to wait a single day. I have been compelled to leave her without even wishing her farewell.—Very truly yours, Zoe Elstree.'

'It is very odd,' he said truthfully. 'I know nothing of these circumstances. I cannot tell you why she has resigned.'

'Oh! I thought I would ask you! Well, she has actually gone: she has vanished; she has left the girl quite alone. This is all very

irregular, isn't it? Not quite what one expects of a lady, is it?'

'Very irregular indeed. Well, I am responsible for her introduction to you, and I will find out, if I can, what it means. She is coming here to-day, she writes: no doubt to give me her reasons. What will Miss Rosevean do?'

'Oh! she is an independent girl. She tells me that she has found a young lady about her own age, and they are going to live together. Alec, I don't quite understand why you thought Mrs. Elstree so likely a person for companion. Philippa tells me that she has no friends, and we appointed her because we thought she had so many.'

'Pleasing — attractive — accomplished — what more did you want? And as for friends, she must have had plenty.'

'But it seems she had none. Nobody has ever called upon her. And she never went into any society. Are you sure that you were not misled about her, my dear boy?

I have heard, for instance, rumours about her and the provincial stage.'

'Oh! rumours are nothing. I don't think I could have been mistaken in her. However, she has gone. I will find out why. As for Armorel Rosevean——'

'Alec—what a splendid girl! Was there no chance there for you? Are you so critical that even Armorel is not good enough for you?'

'Not my style,' he said shortly. 'Never mind the girl.'

'Well—there is one more thing, Alec—and a more pleasant subject—about yourself. I want to ask you one or two questions—family questions.'

'I thought you knew all about my family.'

'So I do, pretty well. However—this is really important—most important. I wouldn't waste your time if it was not important. Do you remember your great-aunt Eleanor Fletcher?'

'Very well. She left all her money to charities—Cat!'

'And your grandmother, Mrs. Needham?'

'Quite well. What is in the wind now? Has Aunt Eleanor been proved to have made a later will in my favour?'

'You will find out in a day or two. Eh! Alec, you are a lucky dog. Painter—poet—nothing in which you do not command success. And now—now——'

'Now—what?'

'That I will tell you, my dear boy, in two or three days. There's many a slip, we know, but this time the cup will reach your lips.'

'What do you mean?' cried the young man, startled. 'Cup? Do you mean to tell me that you have something—something unexpected—coming to me? Something considerable?'

'If it comes—oh! yes, it is quite certain to come—very considerable. You are your mother's only son, and she was an only child, and her grandfather was one Robert Fletcher, wasn't he?'

'I believe he was. There's a family Bible on the shelves that can tell us.'

'Did you ever hear anything about the early life and adventures of this Robert Fletcher?'

'No: he was in the City, I believe, and he left a good large fortune. That is all.'

'That is all. That is all. Well, my dear boy, the strangest things happen: we must never be surprised at anything. But be prepared to-morrow—or next day—or the day after—to be agreeably—most agreeably—surprised.'

'To the tune of—what? A thousand pounds, say?'

'Perhaps. It may amount very nearly to as much—very nearly—Ha! ha!—to nearly as much as that, I dare say—Ho! ho!' He chuckled, and wagged his white head. 'Very nearly a thousand pounds, I dare say.' He walked over to look at the picture.

'Really, Alec,' he said, 'you deserve all the luck you get. Nobody can possibly grudge it to you. This picture is charming. I don't know when I have seen a sweeter thing. You have the finest feeling for rock

and seashore and water. Well, my dear boy, I am very sorry that you haven't as fine a feeling for Armorel Rosevean—the sweetest girl and the best, I believe, in the world. Good-bye!—good-bye! till the day after to-morrow—the day after to-morrow! It will certainly reach to a thousand—or very near. Ho! ho! Lucky dog!'

Mr. Jagenal went away nodding and smiling. There are moments when it is very good to be a solicitor: they are moments rich in blessing: they compensate, in some measure, for those other moments when the guilty are brought to bay and the thriftless are made to tremble: they are the moments when the solicitor announces a windfall—the return of the long-lost Nabob—the discovery of a will—the favourable decision of the Court.

Alec sat down and seized a pen. He wrote hurriedly to his printers: 'Let the present arrangements,' he said, 'continue unchanged. I shall be in a position in two or three days to make a very considerable pay-

ment, and, after that, we will start on a more regular understanding.'

Another knock, and again the discreet man-servant came in on tiptoe. 'Lady refused her card,' he whispered.

The lady was none other than Armorel herself—in morning dress, wearing a hat.

He bowed coldly. There was a light in her eyes, and a heightened colour on her cheek, which hardly looked like a friendly call. But that, of course, one could not expect.

'After our recent interview,' he said, 'and after the very remarkable string of accusations which fell from your lips, I could hardly expect to see you in my studio, Miss Rosevean.'

'I came only to communicate a resolution arrived at by my friends Mr. Roland Lee and Miss Effie Wilmot.'

'From your friends Mr. Roland Lee and Miss Effie Wilmot? May I offer you a chair?'

'Thank you. No. My message is only to tell you this. They have resolved to let the past remain unknown.'

'To let the past remain unknown.' He tried to appear careless, but the girl watched the sudden light of satisfaction in his eyes and the sudden expression of relief in his face. 'The past remain unknown,' he repeated. 'Yes—certainly. Am I—may I ask—interested in this decision?'

'That you know best, Mr. Feilding. It seems hardly necessary to try to carry it off with me—I know everything. But—as you please. They agree that they have been themselves deeply to blame: they cannot acquit themselves. Certainly it is a pitiful thing for an artist to own that he has sold his name and fame in a moment of despair.'

'It would be indeed a pitiful thing if it were ever done.'

'Nothing more, therefore, will be said by either of them as to the pictures or poems.'

'Indeed? From what you have already told me: from the gracious freedom of your

utterances at the National Gallery, I seem to connect those two names with the charges you then brought. They refuse to bring forward, or to endorse, those charges, then? Do you withdraw them?'

'They do not refuse to bring forward the charges. They have never made those charges. I made them, and I, Mr. Feilding'—she raised her voice a little—'I do not withdraw them.'

'Oh! you do not withdraw them? May I ask what your word in the matter is worth unsupported by their evidence—even if their evidence were worth anything?'

'You shall hear what my word is worth. This picture'—she placed herself before it—'is painted by Mr. Roland Lee. Perhaps he will not say so. Oh! it is a beautiful picture—it is quite the best he has ever painted—yet. It is a true picture: you cannot understand either its beauty or its truth. You have never been to the place: you do not even know where it is: why, Sir—it is my birthplace. I lived there until I was sixteen

years of age: the scene, like all the scenes in those pictures you call your own, was taken in the Scilly archipelago.' He started. 'You do not even know the girl who stands in the foreground—your own model. Why—it is my portrait—mine—look at me, Sir—it is my portrait. Now you know what my word is worth. I have only to stand before this picture and tell the world that this is my portrait.'

He started and changed colour. This was unexpected. If the girl was to go on talking in this way outside, it would be difficult to reply. What was he to say if the words were reported to him? Because, you see, once pointed out, there could be no doubt at all about the portrait.

'A portrait of myself,' she repeated.

'Permit me to observe,' he said, with some assumption of dignity, 'that you will find it very difficult to prove these statements—most difficult—and at the same time highly dangerous, because libellous.'

'No, not dangerous, Mr. Feilding. Would

you dare to go into a Court of Justice and swear that these pictures are yours? When did you go to Scilly? Where did you stay? Under what circumstances did you have me for a model? On what island did you find this view?'

He was silent.

'Will you dare to paint anything—the merest sketch—to show that this picture is in your own style? You cannot.'

'Anyone,' he said, 'may bring charges—the most reckless charges. But I think you would hardly dare——'

'I will do this, then. If you dare to exhibit this picture as your own, I will, most assuredly, take all my friends and stand in front of it, and tell them when and where it was painted, and by whom, and show them my own portrait.'

The resolution of this threat quelled him. 'I have no intention,' he said, 'of exhibiting this picture. It is sold to an American, and will go to New York immediately. Next year, perhaps, I may take up your challenge.'

She laughed scornfully. 'I promised Roland,' she said, 'that you should not show this picture. That is settled, then. You shall not, you dare not.'

She left the picture reluctantly. It was dreadful to her to think that it must go, with his name upon it.

On a side-table lay, among a pile of books, the dainty white-and-gold volume of poems bearing the name of this great genius. She took it up, and laughed.

'Oh!' she said. 'Was there ever greater impudence? Every line in this volume was written by Effie Wilmot—every line!'

'Indeed? Who says so?'

'I say so. I have compared the manuscript with the volume. There is not the difference of a word.'

'If Miss Effie Wilmot, for purposes of her own, and for base purposes of deception, has copied out my verses in her own handwriting, probably a wonderful agreement may be found.'

'Shame!' cried Armorel.

'You see the force of that remark. It *is* a great shame. Some girls take to lying naturally. Others acquire proficiency in the art. Effie, I suppose, took to it naturally. I am sorry for Effie. I used to think better of her.'

'Oh! He tries, even now! How can you pretend—you—to have written this sweet and dainty verse? Oh! You dare to put your signature to these poems!'

'Of course,' said the divine Maker, with brazen front and calmly dignified speech, 'if these things are said in public or outside the studio, I shall be compelled to bring an action for libel. I have warned you already. Before repeating what you have said here you had better make quite sure that you can prove your words. Ask Miss Effie Wilmot what proofs she has of her assertion, if it is hers, and not an invention of your own!'

Armorel threw down the volume. 'Poor Effie!' she said. 'She has been robbed of the first-fruits of her genius. How dare you talk of proofs?' She took up the current

number of the journal. 'That is not all,' she said. 'Look here! This is one of your stories, is it not? I read in a paper yesterday that no Frenchman ever had so light a touch: that there are no modern stories anywhere so artistic in treatment and in construction as your own—your own—your very own, Mr. Feilding. Yet they are written for you, every one of them: they are written by Lady Frances Hollington. You are a Triple Impostor. I believe that you really are the very greatest Pretender—the most gigantic Pretender in the whole world.'

'Of course,' he went on, a little abashed by her impetuosity. 'I cannot stop your tongue. You may say what you please.'

'We shall say nothing more. That is what I came to say on behalf of my friends. I wished to spare them the pain of further communication with you.'

'Kind and thoughtful!'

'I have one more question to ask you, Mr. Feilding. Pray, why did you tell people that I was engaged to you?'

'Probably,' he replied, unabashed, 'because I wished it to be believed.'

'Why did you wish it to be believed?'

'Probably for private reasons.'

'It was a vile and horrible falsehood!'

'Come, Miss Rosevean, we will not call each other names. Otherwise I might ask you what the world calls a girl who encourages a man to dangle after her for weeks, till everybody talks about her, and then throws him over.'

'Oh! You cannot mean——' Before those flashing eyes his own dropped.

'I mean that this is exactly what you have done,' he said, but without looking up.

'Is it possible that a man can be so base? What encouragement did I ever give you?'

'You surely are not going to deny the thing, after all. Why, it has been patent for all the world to see you. I have been with you everywhere, in all public places. What hint did you ever give me that my addresses were disagreeable to you?'

'How can one reply to such insinuations?'

asked Armorel, with flaming face. 'And so you followed me about in order to be able to say that I encouraged you! What a man! What a man! You have taught me to understand, now, why one man may sometimes take a stick and beat another. If I were a man, at this moment, I would beat you with a stick. No other treatment is fit for such a man. I to encourage you!—when for a month and more I have known what an Impostor and Pretender you are! You dare to say that I have encouraged you!—you—the robber of other men's name and fame!'

'Well, if you come to that, I do dare to say as much. Come, Miss Armorel Rosevean. I certainly do dare to say as much.'

She turned with a gesture of impatience.

'I have said what I came to say. I will go.'

'Stop a moment!' said Alec Feilding. 'Is it not rather a bold proceeding for a beautiful girl like you, a day or two after you have refused a man, to visit him alone at his studio? Is it altogether the way to let

the world distinctly understand that there never has been anything between us, and that it is all over?'

'I am less afraid of the world than you think. My world is my very little circle of friends. I am very much afraid of what they think. But it is on their account, and with their knowledge, that I am here.'

'Alone and unprotected?'

'Alone, it is true. I can always protect myself.'

'Indeed!' He turned an ugly—a villanous—face towards her. 'We shall see! You come here with your charges and your fine phrases. We shall see!'

He had been standing all this time before his study table. He now stepped quickly to the door. The key was in the lock. He turned it, drew it out, and dropped it in his pocket.

'Now, my lovely lady,' he said, grinning, 'you have had your innings, and I am going to have mine. You have come to this studio in order to have a row with me. You have

had that row. You can use your tongue in a manner that does credit to your early education. As for your nonsense about Roland Lee and Effie and Lady Frances, no one is going to believe that stuff, you know. As for your question, I did tell Lady Frances that you were engaged to me. And I told others. Because, of course, you were—or ought to have been. It was only by some kind of accident that I did not speak before. As I intended to speak the next day, I anticipated the thing by twelve hours or so. What of that? Well, I shall now have to explain that you seem not to know your own mind. It will be awkward for you—not for me. You have thrown me over. And all you have got to say in explanation is a long rigmarole of abuse. This not my own painting? These not my own poems? These, again, not my own stories? Really, Miss Armorel Rosevean, you know so very little of the world—you are so inexperienced—you are so easily imposed upon—that I am inclined to pity rather than to blame you. Of course, you

have tried to do me harm, and I ought to be angry with you. But I cannot. You are much too beautiful. To a lovely woman everything, even mischief, is forgiven.'

'Will you open the door and let me go?'

'All in good time. When I please. It will do you no harm to be caught alone in my studio—alone with me. It will look so like returning to the lover whom, in a moment of temper, you threw over. I will take care that it shall bear that interpretation, if necessary. You have changed your mind, sweet Armorel, have you not? You have repented of that cruel decision?'

He advanced a little nearer. I really believe that he was still confident in his own power of subjugating the sex feminine—Heaven knows why some men always retain this confidence.

Armorel looked round the room: the window was high, too high for her to reach: there was no way of escape except through the door. Then she saw something hanging

on the wall within her reach, and she took courage.

He drew still nearer: he held out his hands, and laughed.

'You are a really lovely girl,' he said. 'I believe there is not a more beautiful girl in the whole world. Before you go, let us make friends and forgive. It is not too late to change your mind. I will forget all you have said and all the mischief you have done me. My man is very discreet. He will say nothing about your visit here, unless I give him permission to speak. This I will never allow unless I am compelled. Come, Armorel, once more let me be your lover—once more. Give me your hands.'

He bowed suppliant. He looked in her face with baleful eyes. He tried to take her hands. Armorel sprang from him and darted to the other end of the room.

The thing she had observed was hanging up among the weapons and armour and tapestry which decorated this wall of the studio. It was an axe from foreign parts, I

think, from Indian parts, with a stout wooden handle and a boss of steel at the upper part. Armorel seized this lethal weapon. It was so heavy that no ordinary girl could have lifted it. But her arm, strengthened by a thousand days upon the water, tugging at the oar, wielded it easily.

'Open the door!' she cried. 'Open the door this moment!'

Her wooer made no reply. He shrank back before the girl who handled this heavy axe as lightly as a paper-knife. But he did not open the door.

'Open it, I say!'

He only shrank back farther. He was cowed before the wrath in her face. He did not know what she would do next. I think he even forgot that the key was in his pocket. The door, a dainty piece of furniture, was not one of the common machine-made things which the competitive German—or is it the thrifty Swede?—is so good as to send over to us. It was a planned and fitted door,

the panels painted with reeds and grasses, the gift of some admirer of genius. Armorel raised the axe—and looked at him. He did not move.

Crash! It went through the panel. Crash! again and again The upper part of the door was a gaping wreck of splinters. Outside, the discreet man servant waited in silence and expectation. Often ladies had held interviews alone with his master. But this was the first time that an interview had ended with such a crash.

'Will you open the door?' she asked again.

The man replied by a curse.

The lock—a piece of imitation mediævalism in iron—was fitted on to the inner part of the door, a very pretty ornament. Armorel raised her axe again, and brought the square boss at the top of it down upon the dainty fragile lock, breaking it and tearing it from the wood. There was no more difficulty in opening the door. She did so. She threw the

hatchet on the carpet and walked away, the discreet man-servant opening the door for her with unchanged countenance, as if the deplorable incident had not happened at all.

CHAPTER XXII

THE END OF WORLDLY TROUBLES

Not more than five minutes afterwards, Mrs. Elstree arrived upon this scene of wreck. The splintered panels, the broken lock, the axe lying on the floor, proclaimed aloud that there had been an Incident of some gravity—certainly what we have called a Deplorable Incident.

Such a thing as a Deplorable Incident in such a place and with such a man was, indeed, remarkable. Mrs. Elstree gazed upon the wreck with astonishment unfeigned: she turned to the tenant of the studio, who stood exactly where Armorel had left him. As the sea when the storm has ceased continues to heave in sullen anger,

so that majestic spirit still heaved with wrath as yet unappeased.

In answer to the mute question of her eyes, he growled, and threw himself into his study-chair. When she picked up the axe and bore it back to its place, he growled. When she pointed to the door, he growled again.

She looked at his angry face, and she laughed gently. The last time we saw her she was pale and hysterical. She was now smiling, apparently in perfect health of body and ease of mind. Perhaps she was a very good actress—off the stage: perhaps she shook off things easily. Otherwise one does not always step from a highly nervous and hysterical condition to one of happiness and cheerfulness.

'There appears to have been a little unpleasantness,' she said softly. 'Something, apparently an axe—something hard and sharp—has been brought into contact with the door. It has been awkward for the

door. There has been, I suppose, an earthquake.'

He said nothing, but drummed the table with his fingers—a sign of impatient and enforced listening.

'Earthquakes are dangerous things, sometimes. Meanwhile, Alec, if I were you I would have the broken bits taken away.' She touched the bell on the table. 'Ford'—this was the name of the discreet manservant—'will you kindly take the door, which you see is broken, off its hinges and send it away to be mended. We will manage with the curtain.'

'What do you want, Zoe?'—when this operation had been effected—'what is the important news you have to bring me? And why have you given up your berth? I suppose you think I am able to find you a place just by lifting up my little finger? And I hear you have gone without a moment's notice, just as if you had run away?'

'I did run away, Alec,' she replied.

'After what has—been done'—she caught her breath—'I was obliged to run away. I could no longer stay.'

'What has been done, then? Did Armorel tell you? No—she couldn't.'

'She has told me nothing. I have hardly seen her at all during the last few days. Of course, I know that you proposed to her—because you went off with that purpose; and that she refused you—because that was certain. And, now, don't begin scolding and questioning, because we have got something much more important to discuss. I have given up my charge of Armorel, and I have come here. If you possibly can, Alec, clear up your face a little, forget the earthquake, and behave with some attempt at politeness. I insist,' she added sharply, 'upon being treated with some pretence at politeness.'

'Mind, I am in no mood to listen to a pack of complaints and squabbles and jealousies.'

'Whatever mind you are in, my dear Alec, it wants the sweetening. You shall

have no squabbles or jealousies. I will not even ask who brought along the earthquake —though, of course, it was an Angel in the House. They are generally the cause of all the earthquakes. Fortunately for you, I am not jealous. The important thing about which I want to talk to you is money, Alec —money.'

Something in her manner seemed to hold out promise. A drowning man catches at a straw. Alec lifted his gloomy face.

'What's the use?' he said. 'You have failed to get money in the way I suggested. I haven't got any left at all. And we are now at the very end. All is over and done, Zoe. The game is ended. We must throw up the sponge.'

'Not just yet, dear Alec,' she said softly.

'Look here, Zoe'—he softened a little. 'I have thought over things. I shall have to disappear for a while, I believe, till things blow over. Now, here's just a gleam of luck. Jagenal the lawyer has been here to-day. He came to tell me that he has discovered, some-

how, something belonging to me. He says it will run up to nearly a thousand pounds. It isn't much, but it is something. Now, Zoe, I mean to convert that thousand into cash—notes—portable property—and I shall keep it in my pocket. Don't think I am going to let the creditors have much of that! If the smash has to come off, I will then give you half, and keep the other half myself. Meantime, the possession of the money may stave off the smash. But if it comes, we will go away—different ways, you know—and own each other no more.'

'Not exactly, my dear Alec. You may go away, if you please, but I shall go with you. For the future, I mean to go the same way as you—with you—beside you.'

'Oh!' His face did not betray immoderate joy at this prospect. 'I suppose you have got something else to say. If that was all, I should ask how you propose to pay for your railway ticket and your hotel bill.'

'Of course, I have got something else to say.'

'It must be something substantial, then. Look here, Zoe: this is really no time for fooling. Everything, I tell you, has gone, and all at once. I can't explain. Credit—everything!'

'I have read,' said Zoe, taking the most comfortable chair and lying well back in it, 'that the wise man once discovered that everybody must be either a hammer or an anvil. I think it was Voltaire. He resolved on becoming the hammer. You, Alec, made the same useful discovery. You, also, became a hammer. So far, you have done pretty well, considering. But now there is a sudden check, and you are thrown out altogether.'

'Well?'

'That seems to show that your plans were incomplete. Your ideas were sound, but they were not fully developed.'

'I don't know you this morning, Zoe. I have never heard you talk like this before.'

'You have never known me, Alec,' she replied, perhaps a little sadly. 'You have never tried to know me. Well—I know all. Mr. Roland Lee, the painter, was one anvil—you

played upon him very harmoniously. Effie Wilmot was another. Now, Alec, don't '—she knew the premonitory symptoms—' don't begin to deny, either with the " D " or without, because, I assure you, I know everything. You are like the ostrich, who buries his head in the sand and thinks himself invisible. Don't deny things, because it is quite useless. Before we go a step farther I am going to make you understand exactly. I know the whole story. I have suspected things for a long time, and now I have learned the truth. I learned it bit by bit through the fortunate accident of living with Armorel, who has been the real discoverer. First I saw the man's work, and I saw at once where you got your pictures from, and what was the meaning of certain words that had passed from Armorel. Why, Armorel was the model—your model, and you didn't know it. And the coast scenery is her scenery—the Scilly Isles, where you have never been. I won't tell you how I pieced things together till I had made a connected story and had no longer any doubt.

But remember the night of the Reading. Why did Armorel hold that Reading? Why did she show the unfinished picture? Why did she sing that song? It was for you, Alec. It was to tell you a great deal more than it told the people. It was to let you know that everything was discovered. Do you deny it now?'

'I suppose that infernal girl—she is capable of everything——'

'Even of earthquakes? No, Alec, she has told me nothing. They've got into the habit of talking—she and Effie and the painter man—as if I was asleep. You see I lie about a good deal by the fireside, and I don't want to talk, and so I lie with my eyes shut and listen. Then Armorel leaves everything about—manuscript poems, sketches, letters—everything, and I read them. A companion, of course, must see that her ward is not getting into mischief. It is her duty to read private letters. When they talk in the evening, Effie, who worships Armorel, tells her everything, including your magnifi-

cent attempt to become a dramatic poet, my dear boy—wrong—wrong—you should not get more than one ghost from one family. You should not put all your ghosts into one basket. When the painter comes—Armorel is in love with him, and he is in love with her ; but he has been a naughty boy, and has to show true repentance before . . . Oh ! It's very pretty and sentimental : they play the fiddle and talk about Scilly and the old times, and Effie sighs with sympathy. It is really very pretty, especially as it all helped me to understand their ghostlinesses and to unravel the whole story. Fortunately, my dear Alec, you have had to do with a girl who is not of the ordinary society stamp, otherwise your story would have been given to the society papers long ago, and then even I could have done nothing for you. Armorel is a girl of quite extinct virtues—forbearing, unrevengeful, honourable, unselfish. You, my dear Alec, could never appreciate or understand such a girl.'

'The girl is—a girl. What is there to

understand in one girl more than in another?'

'Nothing—nothing. O great Poet and greater Painter!—Nothing. O man of fine insight, and delicate fancy, and subtle intellect!—Nothing. Only a girl.'

'I know already that they are not going to say anything more about it. They are going to let the whole business be forgotten. If anything comes out through you——'

'Nothing will come out. I told you because it is well that we should perfectly understand each other. You will never again be able to parade before me in the disguise of genius. This is a great pity, because you have always enjoyed playing the part. Never again, Alec, because I have found you out. Should you ever find me out, I shall not be able to walk with you in the disguise of . . . but you must find out first.'

'What do you mean?'

'Oh! you must find out first. When you do find out, you will be able to hold out your arms and cry, "We are alike at last. You

have come down to my level: we are now in the same depths. Come to my arms, sister in pretence! Come, my bride!"' She spread out her arms with an exaggerated gesture and laughed, but not mirthfully.

'What on earth do you mean, Zoe? I never saw you like this before.'

'No, we change sometimes, quite suddenly. It is very unaccountable. And now I shall never be anything else than what I am now—what you have made me.'

'What have you done, then?'

'Done? Nothing. To do something is polite for committing a crime. Could I have done something, do you think? Could I actually commit a crime? O Alec!—my dear Alec!—a crime? Well, the really important thing is that your troubles are over.'

'By Jove! They are only just beginning.'

'It is only money that troubles you. If it was conscience, or the sense of honour, I could not help you. As it is only money——

how much, actually, will put a period to the trouble?'

'If I were to use Jagenal's promised thousand, I could really manage with two thousand more.'

'Oh! Then, my dear Alec, what do you think of this?'

She drew out of her pocket a new clean white bank-book, and handed it to him.

He opened it. 'Heavens, Zoe! What is the meaning of this?'

'You can read, Alec: it means what it says. Four thousand two hundred and twenty-five pounds standing to my credit. Observe the name—Mrs. Alexander Feilding—Mrs. Alexander Feilding—wife, that is, of Alec! Mrs. Elstree has vanished. She has gone to join the limbo of ghosts who never existed. Her adored Jerome is there, too.'

'What does it mean?'

'It means, again, that I have four thousand two hundred and twenty-five pounds of my own, who, the day before yesterday, had nothing. Where I got that money from is my

own business. Perhaps Armorel relented and has advanced this money—perhaps some old friends of my father's—he had friends, though he was reputed so rich and died so miserably—have quietly subscribed this amount—perhaps my cousins, whom you forced me to abandon, have found me out and endowed me with this sum—a late but still acceptable act of generosity—perhaps my mother's sister, who swore she would never forgive me for going on the stage, has given way at last! In short, my dear Alec—— '

'Four thousand pounds! Where could you raise that money?'

'Make any conjecture you please. I shall not tell you. The main point is that the money is here—safely deposited in my name and to my credit. It is mine, you see, my dear Alec; and it can only be used for your purposes with my consent—under my conditions.'

'How on earth,' he repeated slowly, 'did you get four thousand pounds?'

'It is difficult for you to find an answer

to that question,' she replied, ' isn't it? Especially as I shall not answer it. About my conditions now.'

' What conditions? '

' The possession of this capital—I have thought it all out—will enable us, first of all, to pay off your creditors in full if you must—or at least to satisfy them. Next, it will restore your credit. Thirdly, it will enable you to live while I am laying the foundations of a new and more stable business.'

' You? '

' I, my dear boy. I mean in future to be the active working and contriving partner in the firm. I have the plans and method worked out already in my head. You struck out, I must say, a line of audacity. There is something novel about it. But your plan wanted elasticity. You kept a ghost. Well, I suppose other people have done this before. You kept three or four ghosts, each in his own line. Nobody thought of setting up as the Universal Genius before—at least, not to my knowledge. But, then, you placed your whole dependence

upon your one single family of ghosts. Once deprived of him—whether your painter, your poet, your story-teller—and where were you? Lost! You are stranded. This has happened to you now. Your paper is to come out as usual, and you have got nothing to put into it. Your patrons will be flocking to your studio, and you have got nothing to show. You have made a grievous blunder. Now, Alec, I am going to remedy all this.'

'You?'

'You shall see what I am capable of doing. You shall no longer waste your time and money in going about to great houses. Your wife shall have her *salon*, which shall be a centre of action far more useful and effective. You shall become, through her help, a far greater leader, with a far greater name, than you have ever dreamed of. And your paper shall be a bigger thing.'

'You, Zoe? You to talk like this?'

'You thought I was a helpless creature because I never succeeded on the stage, and could not even carry out your poor little

schemes upon Armorel's purse, I suppose, and because I—— Well, you shall be undeceived.'

'If I could only believe this!'

'You will find, Alec, that my stage experiences will not go for nothing. Why, even if I was a poor actress, I did learn the whole business of stage management. I am going to transfer that business from the stage to the drawing-room, which shall be, at first, this room. We shall play our little comedy together, you and I.' She sprang to her feet, and began to act as if she was on the stage—'It will be a duologue. Your *rôle* will still be that of the Universal Genius; mine will be that of the supposed extinct Lady—the Lady of the Salon—I shall be at home one evening a week—say on Sunday. And it shall be an evening remembered and expected. We shall both take Art seriously: you as the Master, I as the sympathetic and intelligent worshipper of Art. We shall attract to our rooms artists of every kind and those who hang about artistic circles: our furniture shall show the latest artistic craze: foreigners shall come here as

to the art centre of London—we will cultivate the foreign element : young people shall come for advice, for encouragement, for introduction : reputations shall be made and marred in this room : you shall be the Leader and Chief of the World of Art. If there is here and there one who knows that you are a humbug, what matters? Alec'—she struck a most effective attitude—'rise to the prospect! Have a little imagination! I see before me the most splendid future—oh! the most splendid future!'

'All very well. But there's the present staring us in the face. How and where are we to find the—the successors to Lady Frances and Effie and——'

'Where to find ghosts? Leave that to me. I know where there are plenty only too glad to be employed. They can be had very cheap, my dear Alec, I can assure you. Oh! I have not been so low down in the social levels for nothing. You paid a ridiculous price for your ghosts—quite ridiculous. I will find you ghosts enough, never fear.'

'Where are they?'

'When one goes about the country with a travelling company one hears strange things. I have heard of painters—good painters—who once promised to become Royal Academicians, and anything you please, but took to ways—downward ways, you know—and now sit in public-houses and sell their work for fifteen shillings a picture. I will find you such a genius, and will make him take pains and produce a picture worthy of his better days, and you shall have it for a guinea and a pint of champagne.'

Alec Feilding gasped. The vista before him was too splendid.

'Or, if you want verses, I know of a poet who used to write little dainty pieces—*levers de rideau*, *libretti* for little operettas, and so forth. He carries the boards about the streets when he is very hard up. I can catch that creature and lock him up without drink till he has written a poem far better—more manly—than anything that girl of yours could ever produce, for half a crown. And he will never

ask what becomes of it. If you want stories, I know a man—quite a young fellow—who gets about fifteen shillings a week in his travelling company. This fellow is wonderful at stories. For ten shillings a column he will reel you out as many as you want—good stuff, mind—and the papers have never found him out: and he will never ask what has become of them, because he is never sober for more than an hour or two at a time in the middle of the day, and he will forget his own handiwork. Alec, I declare that I can find you as many ghosts as you like, and better—more popular—more interesting than your old lot.'

'If I could only believe——' he repeated.

'You say that because you have never even begun to believe that a woman can do anything. Well, I do not ask you to believe. I say that you shall see. I owe to you the idea. All the working out shall be my own. All the assistance you can give me will be your own big and important presence and your manner of authority. Yes; some men

get rich by the labours of others: you, Alec, shall become famous—perhaps immortal—by the genius—the collected genius, of others.'

His imagination was not strong enough to understand the vision that she spread out before him. In a wooden way, he saw that she intended something big. He only half believed it: he only half understood it: but he did understand that ghosts were to be had.

'There's next week's paper, Zoe,' he said helplessly. 'Nothing for it yet! We mustn't have a breakdown—it would be fatal!'

'Breakdown! Of course not, even if I write it all myself. You don't believe that I can write even, I suppose?'

'Well, you shall do as you like.' He got up and stood over the fire again, sighing his relief. 'At all events, we have got this money. Good Heavens! What a chance! And what a day! I stood here this morning, Zoe, thinking all was lost. Then old Jagenal comes in and tells me of a thousand pounds—said it would run to nearly a thousand. And then you come in with a bank-book of four

thousand! Oh! it's Providential! It's enough to make a man humble. Zoe, I confess'—he took her hands in his, stooped, and kissed her tenderly—'I don't deserve such treatment from you. I do not, indeed. Are you sure about those ghosts? As for me, of course you are right. I can't paint a stroke. I can't make a rhyme. I can't write stories. I can do nothing—but live upon those who can do everything. You are quite sure about those ghosts?'

'Oh, yes! Quite sure. Of course I knew all along. But you must keep it up more religiously than ever, because the business is going to be so much—so very much—bigger. Now for my conditions.'

'Any conditions—any!'

'You will insert this advertisement for six days, beginning to-morrow, in the *Times*.'

He read it aloud. He read it without the least change of countenance, so wooden was his face, so hard his heart.

'On Wednesday, April 21, 1887, at St.

Leonard's, Worthing, Alexander Feilding, of the Grove Studio, Marlborough Road, to Zoe, only daughter of the late Peter Evelyn, formerly of Kensington Palace Gardens.'

'I believe,' he said, folding the paper, 'that was the date. It was three years ago, wasn't it? I say, Zoe, won't it be awkward having to explain things—long interval, you know—engagement as companion—wrong name?'

'I have thought of that. But it would be more awkward pretending that we were married to-day and being found out. No. There are not half-a-dozen people who will ever know that I was Armorel's companion. Then, a circumstance, which there is no need ever to explain, forbade the announcement of our marriage—hint at a near relation's will—I was compelled to assume another name. Cruel necessity!'

'You are a mighty clever woman, Zoe.'

'I am. If you are wise, now, you will assume a joyful air. You will go about

rejoicing that the bar to this public announcement has been at length removed. Family reasons—you will say—no fault of yours or of mine. It is your business, of course, how you will look—but I recommend this line. Be the exultant bridegroom, not the downcast husband. Will you walk so?'—she assumed a buoyant dancing step with a smiling face—'or so?' she hung a dejected head and crawled sadly.

'By gad, it's wonderful!' he cried, looking at her with astonishment. And, indeed, who would recognise the quiet, sleepy, indolent woman of yesterday in the quick, restless, and alert woman of to-day?

'Henceforth I must work, Alec. I cannot sit down and go to sleep any longer. That time has gone. I think I have murdered sleep.'

'Work away, my girl. Nobody wants to prevent you. Are there any other conditions?'

'You will sell your riding-horses and buy a Victoria. Your wife must have something to drive about in. And you will lead, in

many respects, an altered life. I must have, for the complete working out of my plans, an ideal domestic life. Turtle-doves we must be for affection, and angels incarnate for propriety. The highest Art in the home is the highest standard of manners that can be set up.'

'Very good. Any more conditions?'

'Only one more condition. *J'y suis. J'y reste.* You will call your servant and inform him that I am your wife, and the mistress of this establishment. I think there will be no more earthquakes and broken panels. Alec'—she laid her hand upon his arm—'you should have done this three years ago. I should have saved you. I should have saved myself. Now, whatever happens, we are on the same level—we cannot reproach each other. We shall walk hand in hand. It was done for you, Alec. And I would do it again. Yes—yes—yes. Again!' She repeated the words with flashing eyes. 'Fraud—sham—pretence—these are our servants. We command them. By them we live, and by them

we climb. What matter—so we reach the top—by what ladders we have climbed?' She looked around with a gesture of defiance, fine and free. 'The world is all alike,' she said. 'There is no truth or honour anywhere. We are all in the same swim.'

The man dropped into his vacant chair. 'We are saved!' he cried.

'Saved!' she echoed. 'Saved! Did you ever see a Court of Justice, Alec? I have. Once, when our company was playing at Winchester, I went to see the Assizes. I remember then wondering how it would feel to be a prisoner. Henceforth I shall understand his sensations. There they stand, two prisoners, side by side—a man and a woman—a pair of them. Found out at last, and arrested and brought up for trial. There sits the Judge, stern and cold: there are the twelve men of the jury, grave and cold: there are the policemen, stony-hearted: there are the lawyers, laughing and talking: there are the people behind, all grave and cold. No pity in any single face—not a gleam of pity—for

the poor prisoners. Some people go stealing and cheating because they are driven by poverty. These people did not: they were driven by vanity and greed. Look at them in the box: they are well dressed. See! they are curiously like you and me, Alec'—she was acting now better than she ever acted on the stage—'The man is like you, and the woman—oh! you poor, unlucky wretch!—is like me—curiously, comically like me. They will be found guilty. What punishment will they get? As for her, it was for her husband's sake that she did it. But, I suppose, that will not help her. What will they get, Alec?'

He sat up in the chair and heaved a great sigh of relief.

'What are you talking about, my dear? I was not listening. Well; we are saved. It has been a mighty close shave. Another day, and I must have thrown up the sponge. We have a world of work before us; but if you are only half or quarter as clever as you think yourself, we shall do splendidly.' He

laid his arm round her waist, and drew her gently and kissed her again. 'So—now you are sensible—what were you talking about prisoners for? No more separations now. Let me kiss away these tears. And now, Zoe —now—time presses. I am anxious to repair my losses. Where are we to find these ghosts? Sit down. To work! To work!'

CHAPTER XXIII

THE HOUR OF TRIUMPH

A MAN may do a great many things without receiving from the world the least sign of regard or interest. He may write the most lovely verses—and no one will read them. He may design and invent the most beautiful play—which no one will act: he may advocate a measure certain to bring about universal happiness—but no one will so much as read it. There is one thing, however, by which he may awaken a spirit of earnest curiosity and interest concerning himself: he may get married. Everybody will read the announcement of his marriage in the paper: everybody will immediately begin to talk about him. The bridegroom's present position and future prospects, his actual income

and the style in which he will live: the question whether he has done well for himself, or whether he has thrown himself away: the bride's family, her age, her beauty, her *dot*, if she has got any: the question whether she had not a right to expect a better marriage—all these points are raised and debated when a man is married. Also, which is even more remarkable, whatever a man does shall be forgotten by the world, but the story of his marriage shall never be forgotten. A man may live down calumny; he may hold up his head though he has been the defendant in a disgraceful cause; he may survive the scandal of follies and profligacies; he may ride triumphant over misfortune: but he can never live down his own marriage. All those who have married 'beneath' them—whether beneath them in social rank, in manners, in morals, character, in spiritual or in mental elevation, will bear unwilling and grievous testimony to this great truth.

When, therefore, the *Times* announced the marriage of Mr. Alexander Feilding, together

with the fact that the announcement was no less than three years late, great amazement fell upon all men and all women—yea, and dismay upon all those girls who knew this Universal Genius—and upon all who knew or remembered the lady, daughter of the financial City person who let in everybody to so frightful a tune, and then, like another treacherous person, went away and hanged himself. And as many questions were asked at the breakfast-tables of London as there were riddles asked at the famous dinner-party at the town of Mansoul. To these riddles there were answers, but to those none. For instance, why had Alec Feilding concealed his marriage? Where had he hidden his wife? And (among a very few) how could he permit her to go about the country in a provincial troupe? To these replies there have never been any answers. The lady herself, who certainly ought to know, sometimes among her intimate friends alludes to the cruelty of relations, and the power which one's own people have of making mischief. She also

speaks of the hard necessity, owing to these cruelties, of concealing her marriage. This throws the glamour and magic of romance—the romance of money—over the story. But there are some who remain unconvinced.

The bridegroom wrote one letter, and only one, of explanation. It was to Mr. Jagenal, the family solicitor.

'To so old a friend,' he wrote, 'the fullest explanations are due concerning things which may appear strange. Until the day before yesterday there were still existing certain family reasons which rendered it absolutely necessary for us to conceal our marriage and to act with so much prudence that no one should so much as suspect the fact. This will explain to you why we lent ourselves to the little harmless—perfectly harmless—pretence by which my wife appeared in the character of a widow. It also explains why she was unwilling—while under false colours—to go into general society. The unexpected disappearance of these family reasons caused her

to abandon her charge hurriedly. I had not learned the fact when you called yesterday. Now, I hope that we may receive, though late, the congratulations of our friends.—A. F.'

'This,' said Mr. Jagenal, 'is an explanation which explains nothing. Well, it is all very irregular: and there is something behind: and it is no concern of mine. Most things in the world are irregular. The little windfall of which I told him yesterday will be doubly welcome now that he has a wife to spend his money for him. And now we understand why he was always dangling after Armorel—because his wife was with her—and why he did not fall in love with that most beautiful creature.'

He folded up the note; put it, with a few words of his own, into an envelope, and sent it to Philippa. Then he went on with the cases in his hands. Among these were the materials for many other studies into the workings of the feminine heart and the masculine brain. The solicitor's tin boxes: the

doctor's notebook: the priest's memory: should furnish full materials for that exhaustive psychological research which science will some day insist upon conducting.

In the afternoon of the same day was the Private View of the Grosvenor Gallery. There was the usual Private View crowd—so private now that everybody goes there. It would have been incomplete without the presence of Mr. Alec Feilding.

Now, at the very thickest and most crowded time, when the rooms were at their fullest, and when the talk was at its noisiest, he appeared, bearing on his arm a young, beautiful, and beautifully dressed woman. He calmly entered the room where half the people were talking of himself and of his marriage, concealed for three years, with as much coolness as if he had been about in public with his wife all that time: he spoke to his friends as if nothing had happened: and he introduced them to his wife as if it was by the merest accident that they had not already met. Nothing could exceed the unconscious-

ness of his manner, unless it was the simple and natural ease of his wife. No one could possibly guess that there was, or could be, the least awkwardness in the situation.

The thing itself, and the manner of carrying it through, constituted a *coup* of the most brilliant kind. This public appearance deprived the situation, in fact, of all its awkwardness. No one could ask them at the Grosvenor Gallery what it meant. There were one or two to whom the bridegroom whispered that it was a long and romantic story: that there had been a bar to the completion of his happiness, by a public avowal: that this bar—a purely private and family matter—had only yesterday been removed: nothing was really explained: but it was generally felt that the mystery added another to the eccentricities of genius. There was a something, they seemed to remember dimly, about the marriages and love-passages of Shelley, Coleridge, and Lord Byron.

Mrs. Feilding, clearly, was a woman born to be an artist's wife: herself, artistic in her

dress, her manner, and her appearance: sympathetic in her caressing voice: gracious in her manners: and openly proud of a husband so richly endowed.

Alec presented a great many men to her. She had, it seemed, already made acquaintance with their works, which she knew by name: she betrayed involuntarily, by her gracious smile, and the interested, curious gaze of her large and limpid eyes, the genuine admiration which she felt for these works, and the very great pleasure with which she made the acquaintance of this very distinguished author. If any of them were on the walls, she bestowed upon them the flattery of measured and appreciative praise: she knew something of the technique.

'Alec is not exhibiting this year,' she said. 'I think he is right. He had but one picture: and that was in his old style. People will think he can do nothing but sea-coast, rock, and spray. So he is going to send his one picture away—if you want

to see it you must make haste to the studio—and he is going—this is a profound secret—to break out in a new line—quite a new line. But you must not know anything about it.'

A paragraph in a column of personal news published the fact, the very next day, which shows how difficult it is to keep a secret.

Before Mrs. Feilding left the gallery she had made twenty friends for life, and had laid a solid foundation for her Sunday evenings.

In the evening there was a First Night. No First Nights are possible without the appearance of certain people, of whom Mr. Alec Feilding was one. He attended, bringing with him his wife. Some of the men who had been at the private view were also present at the performance, but not many, because the followers of one art do not—as they should—rally round any other. But all the dramatic critics were there, and all the regular first-nighters, including the

wreckers—who go to pit and gallery—and the friends of the author and those of the actors. Between the acts there was a good deal of circulation and talking. Alec presented a good many more gentlemen to his wife. Before they went home Mrs. Feilding had made a dozen more friends for life, and placed her Sunday evenings on a firm and solid basis. Her social success—at least among the men—was assured from this first day.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE CUP AND THE LIP

Two days after the Private View Alec Feilding repaired, by special invitation, to Mr. Jagenal's office.

'I have sent for you, Alec,' said the solicitor, *ami de famille*, 'in continuance of our conversation of the other day—about that little windfall, you know.'

'I am not likely to forget it. Little windfalls of a thousand pounds do not come too often.'

'They do not. Meantime another very important event has happened. I saw the announcement in the paper, and I received your note ——'

'You are the only person—believe me—

to whom I have thought it right to explain the circumstances ——'

'Yes? The explanation, at all events, is one that may be given in the same words—to all the world. I have no knowledge of Mrs. Feilding's friends, or of any obstacles that have been raised to her marriage! But I am rather sorry, Alec, that you sent her to me under a false name, because these things, if they get about, are apt to make mischief.'

'I assure you that this plan was only adopted in order the more effectually to divert suspicion. It was with the greatest reluctance that we consented to enter upon a path of deception. I knew, however, in whose hands I was. At any moment I was in readiness to confess the truth to you. In the case of a stranger the thing would have been impossible. You, however, I knew, would appreciate the motive of our action, and sympathise with the necessity.'

Mr. Jagenal laughed gently—behind the specious words he discerned—something—the shapeless spectre which suspicion calls up or

creates. But he only laughed. 'Well, Alec,' he said, 'marriage is a perfectly personal matter. You are a married man. You had reasons of your own for concealing the fact. You are now enabled to proclaim the fact. That is all anybody need know. We condone the little pretence of the widowhood. Armorel Rosevean has lost her companion; whether she has also lost her friend I do not know. The rest concerns yourself alone. Very good. You are a married man. All the more reason that this little windfall should be acceptable.'

'It will be extremely acceptable, I assure you.'

'Whether it is money or money's worth?'

'To save trouble I should prefer money.'

'You must take it as it comes, my dear boy.'

'Well, what is it?'

'It is,' replied Mr. Jagenal solemnly, 'nothing short of the sea giving up its treasures, the dead giving up her secrets, and the restoration of what was never known to be lost.'

'You a maker of conundrums?'

'You shall hear. Before we come to the thing itself—the treasure, the windfall, the thing picked up on the beach—let me again recall to you two or three points in your own family history. Your mother's maiden name was Isabel Needham. She was the daughter of Henry Needham and Frances his wife. Frances was the daughter of Robert Fletcher.'

'Very good. I believe that is the case.'

'Your money came to you from this Robert Fletcher, your maternal great-grandfather. You should, therefore, remember him.'

'I recognise,' said Alec, sententiously, 'the respect that should be paid to the memory of every man who makes money for his children.'

'Very good. Now, this Robert Fletcher, as a young man, went out to India in search of fortune. He was apparently an adventurous young man, not disposed to sit down at the desk after the usual fashion of young

men who go out to India. We find him in Burmah, for instance—then a country little known by Englishmen. While there he managed to attract the notice and the favour of the King, who employed him in some capacity—traded with him, perhaps; and, at all events, advanced his interests—so that, while still a young man, he found himself in the possession of a fortune ample enough for his wants——'

'Which he left to his daughters.'

'Don't be in a hurry. That was quite another fortune.'

'Oh! Another fortune? What became of the first?'

'Having enough, he resolved to return to his native country. But in Burmah there were then no banks, merchants, drafts, or cheques. He therefore converted his fortune into portable property, which he carried about his person, no one, I take it, knowing anything at all about it. Thus, carrying his treasure with him, he sailed for England. Have you heard anything of this?'

'Nothing at all. The beginning of the story, however, is interesting.'

'You will enjoy the end still better. The ship in which he sailed met with disaster. She was wrecked on the Isles of Scilly. It is said—but this I do not know—that the only man saved from the wreck was your great-grandfather: he was saved by one Emanuel Rosevean, great-great-grandfather to Armorel, the girl whose charge your own wife undertook.'

'Always that cursed girl!' murmured Alec.

'Robert Fletcher was clinging to a spar when he was picked up and dragged ashore. He recovered consciousness after a long illness, and then found that the leather case in which all his fortune lay had slipped from his neck and was lost. Therefore, he had to begin the world again. He went away, therefore. He went away——' Mr. Jagenal paused at this point, rattled his keys, and looked about him. He was not a story-teller by profession, but he knew instinctively that every story, in order

to be dramatic—and he wished this to be a very dramatic history—should be cut up into paragraphs, illustrated by dialogue, and divided into sections. Dialogue being impossible, he stopped and rattled his keys. This meant the end of one chapter and the beginning of another.

'Do pray get along,' cried his client, now growing interested and impatient.

'He went away,' the narrator repeated, 'his treasure lost, to begin the world again. He came here, became a stockbroker, made money—and the rest you know. He appears never to have told his daughters of his loss. I have been in communication with the solicitors of the late Eleanor Fletcher, your great-aunt, and I cannot learn from them that she ever spoke of this calamity. Yet had she known of it she must have remembered it. To bring all your fortune—a considerable fortune — home in a bag tied round your neck, and to lose it in a shipwreck is a disaster which would, one thinks,

be remembered to the third and fourth generations.'

'I should think so. But you said something about the sea giving up its treasure.'

'That we come to next. Five years ago, by the death of a very aged lady, her great-great-grandmother, Armorel Rosevean succeeded to an inheritance which turned out to be nothing less than the accumulated savings of many generations. Among other possessions she found in this old lady's room a sea-chest containing things apparently recovered from wrecks, or drowned men, or washed ashore by the sea—a very curious and interesting collection: there were snuff-boxes, watches, chains, rings, all kinds of things. Among these treasures she turned out, at the bottom of the chest, a case of shagreen with a leather thong. On opening this Armorel found it to contain a quantity of precious stones, and a scrap of paper which seemed to show that they had formerly been the property of one Robert Fletcher. We may suppose, if we please,

that the case containing the jewels was cast up on the beach after the storm, and tossed into the chest without much knowledge of its contents or their value. We may suppose that Emanuel Rosevean found the case. We may suppose what we please, because we can prove nothing. For my own part, I think there is no reasonable doubt that the case actually contained the fortune of Robert Fletcher. The dates of the story seem to correspond: the handwriting appears to be his: we have letters of his speaking of his intention to return, and of his property being in convenient portable shape.'

'Well—then—this portable fortune belongs to Robert Fletcher's heirs.'

'Not so quick. How are you going to prove your claim? You have nothing to go by but a fragment of writing with part of his name on it. You cannot prove that he was shipwrecked, and if you could do that you could not prove that these jewels belonged to him.'

'If there is no doubt, she ought to give them up. She is bound in honour.'

'I said that in my mind there is no reasonable doubt. That is because I have heard a great deal more than could be admitted in evidence. But now—listen again without interrupting. When, five years ago, the young lady placed the management of her affairs in my hands through the Vicar of her parish, I had every part of her very miscellaneous fortune valued and a part of it sold. I had these rubies examined by a merchant in jewels.'

'And how much were they worth?'

'One with another—some being large and very valuable indeed, and others small—they were said, by my expert, to be worth thirty-five thousand pounds. They might, under favourable circumstances and if judiciously placed in the market realise much more. Thirty-five thousand pounds!'

'What?' He literally opened his mouth. 'How much do you say?'

'Thirty-five thousand pounds.'

'Oh! But the stones are not hers—they belong—they belong—to us—to the descendants of Robert Fletcher.' No one would have called that face wooden, now. It was full of excitement—the excitement of a newly awakened hope. 'Does she propose to buy me off with a thousand pounds? Does she think I am to be bought off at any price? The jewels are mine—mine—that is, I have a share in them.'

'Gently—gently—gently! What proof have you got of this story? Nothing. You never heard of it: your great-grandfather never spoke of it. Nothing would have been heard of it at all but for this old lady from whom Armorel inherited. The property is hers as much as anything else. If she gives up anything it is by her own free and uncompelled will. She need give nothing. Remember that.'

'Then she offers me a miserable thousand pounds for my share—which ought to be at least a third. Jagenal'—he turned purple and the veins stood out on his forehead—

'That infernal girl hates me! She has done me—I cannot tell you how much mischief. She persecutes me. Now she offers to buy me out of my share of thirty-five thousand pounds—a third share—nay—a half, because my great-aunt left no children—for a thousand pounds down!'

'I did not say so.'

'You told me that the windfall would amount to a thousand pounds.'

'That was in joke, my boy. You are perfectly wrong about Armorel hating you. How can she hate you? You are so far wrong in this instance that she has instructed me to give you the whole of this fortune—actually to make you a free gift of the whole property—the whole, mind—thirty-five thousand pounds!'

'To me! Armorel gives me—me—the whole of this fortune?' Blank astonishment fell upon him. He stood staring—open-mouthed. 'To ME?' he repeated.

'To you. She does not, to be sure, know to whom she gives it. She is only desirous

of restoring the jewels which she insists in believing to belong to Robert Fletcher's family. Therefore, as it would be obviously impossible to find out and to divide this fortune among all the descendants of Robert Fletcher, who are scattered about the globe, she was resolved to give them to the eldest descendant of the second daughter.'

'Oh!' Alec turned pale, and dropped into a chair, broken up. 'To the eldest descendant of the second—the second daughter. Then——'

'Then to you, as the only grandson of the second daughter—Frances.'

'The second daughter was——' He checked himself. He sighed. He sat up. His eyes, always small and too close together, grew smaller and closer together. 'The other branch of the family,' he said slowly, 'has vanished—as you say—it is scattered over the face of the globe. I do not know anything about my cousins—if I have any cousins. Perhaps when you have carried on the search a little further——'

'But I am not going to carry it on any further at all. Why should I? We have nothing more to learn. I am instructed by Armorel to give the rubies to you. It is a gift—not a right. It is not an inheritance, remember—it is a free gift. She says, "These rubies used to belong to Robert Fletcher. I will restore them to someone of his kin." You are that someone. Why should I inquire further?'

'Oh!' Alec sank back in his chair and closed his eyes as one who recovers from a sharp pang, and sighed deeply. 'If you are satisfied, then—— But if other cousins should turn up——'

'They will have nothing, because nobody is entitled to anything. Come Alec, my boy, you look a little overcome. It is natural. Pull yourself together, and look at the facts. You will have thirty-five thousand pounds—perhaps a little more. At four per cent.—I think I can put you in the way of getting so much with safety—you will have fourteen hundred a year. You will have that, apart

from your literary and artistic income. It is not a gigantic fortune, it is true; but let me tell you that it is a very handsome addition indeed to any man's income. You will not be able to live in Kensington Palace Gardens, where your wife lived as a girl; but you can take a good house and see your friends, and have anything in reason. Well, that is all I have to say, except to congratulate you, which I do, my Alec'—he seized the fortunate young man's hand and shook it warmly—'most heartily. I do, indeed. You deserve your good luck—every bit of the good luck that has befallen you. Everybody who knows you will rejoice. And it comes just at the right moment—just when you have acknowledged your marriage and taken your wife home.'

'Really,' said Alec, now completely recovered, 'I am overwhelmed with this stroke of luck. It is the most unexpected thing in the world. I could never have dreamed of such a thing. To find out, on the same day, that one's great-grandfather once made a fortune and lost it, and that it has been

recovered, and that it is all given to me—it naturally takes one's breath away at first.'

'You would like to gaze upon this fortune from the Ruby Mines of Burmah, would you not?' Mr. Jagenal threw open the door of a safe, and took out a parcel in brown paper. 'It is here.' He opened the parcel, and disclosed the shagreen case which we have already seen in the sea-chest. He laid it on the table, and unrolled the silk in which the stones were rolled. 'There they are—look common enough, don't they? One seems to have picked up stones twice as pretty on the sea-shore: here are two or three cut and polished—bits of red glass would look as pretty.'

'Thirty-five thousand pounds!' Alec cried, laying a hand, as if in episcopal benediction, upon the treasure. 'Is it possible that this little bundle of stones should be worth so much?'

'Quite possible. Now—they are yours—what will you do with them?'

'First, I will ask you to put them back in the safe.'

'I will send them to your bank if you please.'

'No—keep them here—I will consult you immediately about their disposition. Thirty-five thousand pounds! Thirty-five——perhaps we may get more for them. What am I to say to this girl? Perhaps when she learns who has got the rubies she will refuse to let them go. I am sure she would never consent.'

'Nonsense—about persecution and annoyance! Armorel hate you? Why should she hate you? The sweetest girl in the world. You men of genius are too ready to take offence. The things are yours. I have given them to you by her instructions. I have written you a letter, formally conveying the jewels to you. Here it is. And now go home, my dear fellow, and when you feel like taking a holiday, do it with a tranquil mind, remembering that you've got fourteen hundred pounds a year given you for nothing at all by this young lady, who wasn't obliged to give you a penny. Why, in surrendering

these jewels, she has surrendered a good half of her whole fortune. Find me another girl, anywhere, who would give up half her fortune for a scruple. And now go away, and tell your wife. Let her rejoice. Tell her it is Armorel's wedding present.'

Alec Feilding walked home. He was worth thirty-five thousand pounds—fourteen hundred pounds a year. When one comes to think of it, though we call ourselves such a very wealthy country, there are comparatively few, indeed, among us who can boast that they enjoy an income of fourteen hundred pounds a year, with no duties, responsibilities, or cares about their income —and with nothing to do for it. Fourteen hundred pounds a year is not great wealth; but it will enable a man to keep up a very respectable style of living: many people in society have got to live on a great deal less. He and his wife were going to live on nothing a year, except what they could get by their wits. Fourteen hundred a year! They could still exercise their wits: that is to say, he

should expect his wife, now the thinking partner, to exercise her wits with zeal. But what a happiness for a man to feel that he does not live by his wits alone! Alas! It is a joy that is given to few indeed of us.

As for his late literary and artistic successes, how poor and paltry did they appear to this man, who had no touch of the artist nature, beside this solid lump of money, worth all the artistic or poetic fame that ever was achieved!

He went home dancing. He was at peace with all mankind. He found it in his heart to forgive everybody: Roland Lee, who had so basely deserted him: Effie, that snake in the grass: Lady Frances, the most treacherous of women: Armorel herself —— Oh! Heavens! what could not be forgiven to the girl who had made him such a gift? Even the revolt against his authority: even the broken panel, the shattered lock, and the earthquake.

In this mood he arrived home. His wife, the thinking partner, was hard at work in

the interests of the new firm. In her hand was a manuscript volume of verse: on the table beside her lay an open portfolio of sketches and drawings.

'You see, Alec,' she looked up, smiling. 'Already the ghosts have begun to appear at my call. If you ask me where I found them, I reply, as before, that when one travels about with a country company one has opportunities. All kinds of queer people may be heard of. Your ghosts, in future, my dear boy, must be of the tribe which has broken down and given in, not of those who are still young and hopeful. I have found a man who can draw—here is a portfolio full of his things: in black and white: they can be reproduced by some photographic process: he is in an advanced stage of misery, and will never know or ask what becomes of his things. He ought to have made his fortune long ago. He hasn't, because he is always drunk and disreputable. It will do you good to illustrate the paper with your own drawings. There's a painter I have

heard of. He drinks every afternoon and all the evening at a certain place, where you must go and find him. He has long since been turned out of every civilised kind of society, and you can get his pictures for anything you like: he can't draw much, I believe, but his colouring is wonderful. There is an elderly lady, too, of whom I have heard. She can draw, too, and she's got no friends and can be got cheap. And this book is full of the verses of a poor wretch who was once a rising literary man, and now carries a banner at Drury-Lane Theatre whenever they want a super. As for your stories, I have got a broken-down actor—he writes better than he can act—to write stories of the boards. They will appear anonymously, and if people attribute them to you he will not be able to complain. Oh, I know what I am about, Alec! Your paper shall double its circulation in a month, and shall multiply its circulation by ten in six months, and without the least fear of such complications as have happened lately.

They must be avoided for the future—proposals as well as earthquakes—my dear Alec.'

Alec sat down on the table and laughed carelessly. 'Zoe,' he said, 'you are the cleverest woman in the world. It was a lucky day for us both when you came here. I made a big mistake for three years. Now I've got some news for you—good news——'

'That can only mean—money.'

'It does mean—money, as you say. Money, my dear. Money that makes the mare to go.'

'How much, Alec?'

'More than your four thousand. Twenty times as much as that little balance in your book.'

'Oh, Alec! is it possible? Twenty times as much? Eighty thousand pounds?'

'About that sum,' he replied, exaggerating with the instincts of the City, inherited, no doubt, from Robert Fletcher. 'Perhaps quite that sum if I manage certain sales cleverly.'

'Is it a legacy?—or an inheritance?—how did you get it?'

'It is not exactly a legacy: it is a kind of restoration to an unknown person: a gift not made to me personally, but to me unknown.'

'You talk to me in riddles, Alec.'

'I would talk in blank verse if I could. It is, indeed, literally true. I have received an—estate—in portable property worth nearly forty thousand pounds.'

'Oh! Then we shall be really rich, and not have to pretend quite so much? A little pretence, Alec, I like. It makes me feel like returning to society: too much pretence reminds one of the policeman.'

'Don't you want to know how I have come into this money?'

'I am not curious, Alec. I like everything to be done for me. When I was a girl there were carriages and horses and everything that I wanted—all ready—all done for me, you know. Then I was stripped of all. I had nothing to do or to say in the

matter. It was done for me. Now, you tell me you have got eighty thousand pounds. Oh! Heavens! It is done for me. The ways of fate are so wonderful. Things are given and things are taken away. Why should I inquire how things come? Perhaps this will be taken away in its turn.'

'Not quite, Zoe. I have got my hand over it. You can trust your husband, I think, to keep what he has got.' Indeed, he looked at this moment cunning enough to be trusted with keeping the National Debt itself.

'Eighty thousand pounds!' she said. 'Let me write it down. Eighty thousand pounds! Eight and one, two, three, four oughts.' She wrote them down, and clasped her hands, saying, 'Oh! the beauty—the incomparable beauty—of the last ought!'

'Perhaps not quite so much,' said her husband, thinking that the exaggeration was a little too much.

'Don't take off one of my oughts—not my fourth: not my Napoleon of oughts!'

'No—no. Keep your four oughts. Well, my dear, if it is only sixty thousand or so, there is two thousand a year for us. Two thousand a year!'

'Don't, Alec; don't! Not all at once. Break it gently.'

'We will carry on the paper; and perhaps do something or other—carefully, you know—in Art. There is no need to knock things off. And if you can make the paper succeed, as you think, there will be so much the more. Well, we can use it all. For my part, Zoe, my dear, I don't care how big the income is. I am equal to ten thousand.'

'Of course, and you will still pronounce judgments and be a leader. Now let us talk of what we will do—where we will live—and all. Two thousand is pretty big to begin with, after three years' tight fit; but the paper will bring in another two thousand easily. I've been looking through the accounts—bills and returns—and I am sure it has been villanously managed. We will

run it up: we will have ten thousand a year to spend. A vast deal may be done with ten thousand a year: we will have a big weekly dinner as well as an At Home. We will draw all the best people in London to the house: we will——'

She enlarged with great freedom on what could be done with this income: she displayed all the powers of a rich imagination: not even the milkmaid of the fable more largely anticipated the joys of the future.

'And, oh! Alec,' she cried. 'To be rich again! rich only to the limited extent of ten thousand a year, is too great happiness. When my father was ruined, I thought the world was ended. Well, it was ended for me, because you made me leave it and disappear. The last four years I should like to be clean forgotten and driven out of my mind—horrid years of failing and enduring and waiting! And now we are rich again! Oh! we are rich again! It is too much happiness!'

The tears rose to her eyes; her soft and murmuring voice broke.

'My poor Zoe,' her husband laid his hand on hers, 'I am rejoiced,' he said, 'as much for your sake as for my own.'

'How did you get this wonderful fortune, Alec?'

'Through Mr. Jagenal, the lawyer. It's a long story. A great-grandfather of mine was wrecked, and lost his property. That was eighty years ago. Now, his property was found. Who do you think found it? Armorel Rosevean. And she has restored it —to me.'

'What?' She sprang to her feet, her face suddenly turning white. 'What? Armorel?'

'Yes, certainly. Curious coincidence, isn't it? The very girl who has done me so much mischief. The man was wrecked on the island where her people lived.'

'Yes—yes—yes. The property—what was it? What was it? Quick!'

'It was a leather case filled with rubies

—rubies worth at least thirty-five thousand pounds—— What's the matter?'

'Rubies! Her rubies! Oh! Armorel's rubies! No—no—no—not that! Anything —anything but that! Armorel's rubies—Armorel's rubies!'

'What is the matter, Zoe? What is it?'

She gasped. Her eyes were wild: her cheek was white. She was like one who is seized with some sudden horrible and unintelligible pain. Or she was like one who has suddenly heard the most dreadful and most terrible news possible.

'What is it, Zoe?' her husband asked again.

'You? Oh! you have brought me this news—you! I thought, perhaps, someone—Armorel—or some other might find me out. But you!—you!'

'Again, Zoe'—he tried to be calm, but a dreadful doubt seized him—'what does this mean?'

'I remember,' she laughed wildly, 'what I said when I gave you the bankbook. If

you found me out, I said, we should be both on the same level. You would be able to hold out your arms, I said, and to cry, "You have come down to my level. Come to my heart, sister in wickedness." That is what I said. Oh! I little thought—it was a prophecy—my words have come true.'

She caught her head with her hand—it is a stagey gesture: she had learned it on the stage: yet at this moment of trouble it was simple and natural.

'What the DEVIL do you mean?' he cried with exasperation.

'They were *your* rubies all the time, and I did not know. Your rubies! If I had only known! Oh! what have I done? What have I done?'

'Tell me quick, what you have done.' He caught her by the arm roughly. He actually shook her. His own face now was almost as white as hers. 'Quick—tell me—tell me—tell me!'

'You wanted money badly,' she gasped. Her words came with difficulty. 'You told

me so every time I saw you. It was to get money that I went to live with Armorel. I could not get it in that way. But I found another way. She told me about the rubies. I knew where they were kept. In the bank. In a sealed packet. I had seen an inventory of the things in the bank. Armorel told me the story of the rubies, and I never believed it—I never thought that there would be any search for the man's heirs. I never thought the story was true. She told me, besides, all about her other things—her miniatures and snuffboxes, and watches and rings. She showed me all her beautiful lace, worth thousands. And as for the gold things and the jewels, they were all in the bank, in separate sealed parcels, numbered. She showed me the bank receipts. Opposite each number was written the contents of each, and opposite Number Three was written "The case containing the rubies."'

'Well? Well?'

'Hush! What did I do? Let me think. I am going mad, I believe. It was for your

sake—all for your sake, Alec! All for your sake that I have ruined you!'

'Ruined me? Quick! What have you done?'

'It was for your sake, Alec—all for your sake! Oh, for your own sake I have lost and ruined you!'

'You will drive me mad, I think!' he gasped.

'I wrote a letter, one day, to the manager of the bank. I wrote it in imitation of Armorel's hand. I signed her name at the end so that no one could have told it was a forgery. My letter told him to give the sealed packet numbered three to the bearer who was waiting. I sent the letter by a commissionaire. He returned bringing the packet with him.'

'And then?'

'Oh! Then—then—Alec, you will kill me—you will surely kill me when you know! You care for nothing in the world but for money—and I—I have stolen away your money! It is gone—it is gone!'

'You stole those rubies? But I have seen them. They are in Jagenal's safe. What do you mean?' he cried hoarsely.

'I have sold them. I stole them, and I sold them all—they were worth—how much did you say? Fifty—sixty—eighty thousand pounds? I sold them all, Alec, for four thousand two hundred and twenty-five pounds! I sold them to a Dutchman in Hatton Garden.'

'You are raving mad! You dream! I have seen them. I have handled them.'

'What you have seen were the worthless imitation jewels that I substituted. I found out where to get sham rubies made of paste, or something—some cut and some uncut. I bought them, and I substituted them in the case. Then I returned the packet to the bank. I had the packet in my possession no more than one morning. The man who bought the stones swore they were worth no more. He said he should lose money by them: he was going away to America immediately, and wanted to settle at once.

otherwise he would not give so much. That is what I have done, Alec.'

'Oh!' he stood over her, his eyes glaring; he roared like a wild beast; he raised his hand as if to slay her with a single blow. But he could find no words. His hand remained raised—he was speechless—he was motionless—he was helpless with blind rage and madness.

His wife looked up, and waited. Now that she had told her tale she was calm.

'If you are going to kill me,' she said, 'you had better do it at once. I think I do not care about living any longer. Kill me, if you like.'

He dropped his arm: he straightened himself, and stood upright.

'You are a Thief!' he said hoarsely. 'You are a wretched, miserable THIEF!'

She pointed to the picture on the easel.

'And you—my husband?'

He threw himself into a chair. Then he got up and paced the room: he beat the air

with his hands: his face was distorted: his eyes were wild: he abandoned himself to one of those magnificent rages of which we read in History. William the Conqueror—King Richard—King John—many mediæval kings used to fall into these rages. They are less common of late. But then such provocation as this is rare in any age.

When, at last, speech came to him, it was at first stuttering and broken: speech of the elementary kind: speech of primitive man in a rage: speech ejaculatory: speech interjectional: speech of railing and cursing. He walked—or, rather, tramped—about the room: he stamped with his foot: he banged the table with his fist: he roared: he threatened: he cleared the dictionary of its words of scorn, contempt, and loathing: he hurled all these words at his wife. As a tigress bereft of her young, so is such a man bereft of his money.

His wife, meantime, sat watching, silent. She waited for the storm to pass. As for what he said, it was no more than the rolling

of thunder. She made no answer to his reproaches; but for her white face you would have thought she neither heard nor felt nor cared.

Outside, the discreet man-servant heard every word. Once, when his master threatened violence, he thought it might be his duty to interfere. As the storm continued, he began to feel that this was no place for a man-servant who respected himself. He remembered the earthquake. He had then been called upon to remove from its hinges a door fractured in a row. That was a blow. He was now compelled to listen while a master, unworthy of such a servant, brutally swore at his wife. He perceived that his personal character and his dignity no longer allowed him to remain with such a person. He resigned, therefore, that very day.

When the bereaved sufferer could say no more—for there comes a time when even to shriek fails to bring relief—he threw himself into a chair and began to cry. Yes: he cried like a child: he wept and sobbed and

lamented. The tears ran down his cheeks: his voice was choked with sobs. The discreet man-servant outside blushed with shame that such a thing should happen under his roof. The wife looked on without a sign or a word. We break down and cry when we have lost the thing which most we love—it may be a wife; it may be a child: in the case of this young man the thing which most he loved and desired was money. It had been granted to him—in large and generous measure. And, lo! it was torn from his hands before his fingers had even closed around it. Oh! the pity—the pity of it!

This fit, too, passed away.

Half an hour later, when he was quite quiet, exhausted with his rage, his wife laid her hand upon his shoulder.

'Alec,' she said, 'I have always longed for one thing most of all. It was the only thing, I once thought, that made it worth the trouble to live. An hour ago it seemed that the thing had been granted to me. And I was happy even with this guilt upon my

soul. I know you for what you are. Yet I desired your love. Henceforth, this dreadful thing stands between us. You can no longer love me—that is certain, because I have ruined you—any more than I can hold you in respect. Yet we will continue to walk together—hand in hand—I will work and you shall enjoy. If we do not love each other, we can continue in partnership, and show to the world faces full of affection. At least you cannot reproach me. I am a thief, it is true—most true! And you—Alec! you—oh! my husband!—what are you?'

CHAPTER XXV

TO FORGET IT ALL

When Philippa read the announcement in the *Times*, she held her breath for a space. It was at breakfast. Her father was reading the news; she was looking through that column which interests us all more than any other. Her eye fell upon her cousin's name. She read, she changed colour, she read again. Her self-control returned. She laid down the paper. 'Here,' she said, 'is a very astonishing announcement!' A very astonishing announcement indeed!

An hour later she called upon Armorel at her rooms.

'You are left quite alone in consequence of this—this amazing revelation?'

'Quite. Not that I mind being alone. And Effie Wilmot is coming.'

'Nothing in the world,' said Philippa, 'could have astonished me more. It is not so much the fact of the marriage—indeed, my cousin's name was mentioned at one time a good deal in connection with hers—but the dreadful duplicity. He sent her to you—she came to us—as a widow. And for three years they have been married! Is it possible?'

'Indeed,' said Armorel, 'I know nothing. She left me without a cause, and now I hear of her marriage. That is all.'

'My dear, the thing reflects upon us. It is my cousin who has brought this trouble upon you.'

'Oh! no, Philippa! As if you could be held responsible for his actions! And, indeed, you must not speak of trouble. I have had none. My companion was never my friend in any sense: we had nothing in common: we must have parted company very soon: she irritated me in many ways,

especially in her blind praise of the man who now turns out to be her husband. I really feel much happier now that she has gone.'

'But you have no companion—no chaperon.'

'I don't want any chaperon, I assure you.'

'But you cannot go into society alone.'

'I never do go into society. You know that nobody ever called upon Mrs. Elstree—or Mrs. Feilding, as we must now call her. There are only two houses in the whole of this great London into which I have found an entrance—yours and Mr. Jagenal's.'

'Yes; I know now. And most disgraceful it is that you should have been so sacrificed. That also is my cousin's doing. He represented his wife—it seems difficult to believe that he has got a wife—as a person belonging to a wide and very desirable circle of friends. Not a soul called upon her! The world cannot continue to know a woman who has disappeared bodily for three long years,

during which she was reported to have been seen on the stage of a country theatre. What has she been doing? Why has she been in hiding? It was culpable negligence in Mr. Jagenal not to make inquiries. What it must be called in my cousin others may determine. As for you, Armorel, you have been most disgracefully and shamefully treated.'

'I suppose I ought to have had a companion who was recognised by society. But it seems to matter very little. I have made one or two new friends, and I have found an old friend.'

'It is not too late, of course, even for this season. Now, my dear Armorel, I am charged with a mission. It is to bring you back with me—to get you to stay with us for the season and, at least, until the summer holidays. That is, if you would be satisfied with our friends.'

'Thank you, Philippa, a thousand times. I do not think I can accept your kindness, however, because I feel as if I must go away

somewhere. I have had a great deal of anxiety and worry. It has been wretched to feel—as I have been made to feel—that I was in the midst of intrigues and designs, the nature of which I hardly understood. I must go away out of the atmosphere. I will return to London when I have forgotten this time. I cannot tell you all that has been going on, except that I have discovered one deception after another——'

'She is an abominable woman,' said Philippa.

'On the island of Samson, at least, there will be no wives who call themselves widows, and no men who call themselves'—painters and poets, she was going to say, but she checked herself—'call themselves,' she substituted, 'single men, when they are already married.'

'But, surely you will not go away now—just at the very beginning of the season?'

'The season is nothing at all to me.'

'Oh! But, Armorel—think. You ought to belong to society. You are wealthy: you

are a most beautiful girl: you are quite young: and you have so many gifts and accomplishments. My dear cousin, you might do so well, so very well. There is no position to which you could not aspire.'

Armorel laughed. 'Not in that way,' she said. 'I have already told you, dear Philippa, that I am not able to think of things in that way.'

'Always that dream of girlhood, dear? Well, then, come and show yourself, if only to make the men go mad with love and the women with envy. Stay with us. Or, if you prefer it, I will find you a companion who really does belong to the world.'

'No, no; for the present I have had enough of companions. I want nothing more than to go home and rest. I feel just a little battered. My first experience of London has not been, you see, quite what I expected Let me go away, and come back when I feel more charitable towards my fellow-creatures.'

'You have had a most horrid experience,'

said Philippa. 'I trembled for you when I learned who your companion was. I was at school with her, and—well, I do not love her. But what could I do? Mr. Jagenal said she had been most strongly recommended —I could not interfere: it was too late: and besides, after what had happened, years before, it would have looked vindictive. And then she has been rich and is now poor, and perhaps, I thought, she wanted money: and when one has quarrelled it is best to say nothing against your enemy. Besides, I knew nothing definite against her. She said she was a widow—my cousin Alec said that he had been an old friend of her husband: he spoke of having helped him. Oh! he made up quite a long and touching story about his dead friend. So, you see, I refrained, and if I could say nothing good, I would say nothing bad.'

'I am sure that no one can possibly blame you in the matter, Philippa.'

'Yet I blame myself. For if I had caused a few questions to be asked at first, all the

lies about the widowhood might have been avoided.'

'Others would have been invented.'

'Perhaps. Well—she is married, and I don't suppose her stay here will have done you any real harm. As for her, to go masquerading as a widow and to tell a thousand lies daily can hardly do any woman much good. Have you made up your mind how you will treat her if you should meet?'

'She has settled that question. She wrote me a letter saying that she has behaved so badly that she wishes never to see me again. And if we should meet she begs that it will be as perfect strangers.'

'Really—after all that has been done—that is the very least——'

'So we are to meet as strangers. I suppose that will be best. It would be impossible to ask for explanations. Poor Zoe! One does not know all her history. She told me once that she had been very unhappy. I have heard her crying in her room at night. Perhaps, she is to be more pitied than blamed.

It is her husband whom I find it difficult to forgive and to forget. He is like a nightmare: he cannot be put so easily out of my mind.'

'Unfortunately, no. I, who have thought of him all my life, must continue to think of him.'

'You will forgive him, Philippa. You must. Besides, you have less to forgive. He has never offered his hand and heart to you.'

Philippa blushed a rosy red, and confusion gathered to her eyes, because there had, in fact, been many occasions when things were said which—— Armorel was sorry that she had said this.

'You mean, Armorel, that he actually—did this—to you?'

'Yes. It was only the other day—the morning after we read the play. He came to the National Gallery, where I often go in the morning, and, in one of the rooms, he told me how much he loved me—words, however, go for nothing in such things—and kindly said

that marriage with me would complete his happiness.'

'Oh! He is a villain—a villain indeed!' Her voice rose and her cheeks flushed. 'Forgive him, Armorel? Never!'

'Considering that it was only a day or two before he was going to announce in the paper the fact that he had been married for three years, it does seem pretty bad, doesn't it?'

'And you, Armorel?'

'Fortunately, I was able to dismiss him unmistakably.'

'Oh!' Philippa cried in exasperation. 'My cousin has been guilty of many treacherous and base actions; but this is quite the worst thing that I have heard of him—worse even than sending you his own wife, under a false name and disguised with a lying story on her lips. No, Armorel; I will never forgive him. Never!' Her eyes gleamed and her lips trembled. She meant what she said. 'Never! It is the worst, the most wicked thing he has ever done—because he might have succeeded.'

'I suppose he meant to get something by the pretence.'

'He wanted, I suppose, to have it reported that he was going to marry a rich girl. I had heard that he was continually seen with you. And I had also heard that he had confessed to an engagement which was not to be announced. My father has found out that his affairs are in great confusion.'

'But what good would an engagement of twenty-four hours do for him?'

'Indeed, I do not understand. Perhaps, after all, he had allowed himself to fall in love—but I do not know. Men sometimes seem to behave like mad creatures, with no reason or rule of self-control—as if there was no such thing as consequence and no such thing as the morrow. I do not understand anything about him. Why are his affairs in confusion? He had, to begin with, a fortune of more than twelve thousand pounds from his mother; his pictures latterly commanded a good price. And his paper is supposed to be doing well. To be sure he keeps horses

and goes a great deal into society. And, perhaps, his wife has been a source of expense to him. But it is no use trying to explain or to find out things. Meantime, to you, his conduct has been simply outrageous. A man who sends his own wife as companion to a girl, and then makes love to her, is—my dear, there is no other word—he is a Wretch. I will never forgive him.' Armorel felt that she would keep her word. This pale, calm, self-contained Philippa could be moved to anger. And again she heard her companion's soft voice murmuring, 'My dear, the woman shows that she loves him still.'

'Fortunately for me,' said Armorel, 'my heart has remained untouched. I was never attracted by him; and latterly, when I had learned certain things, it became impossible for me to regard him with common kindliness. And, besides, his pretence and affectation of love were too transparent to deceive anybody. He was like the worst actor you ever saw on any stage—wooden, unreal—incapable of im-

pressing anyone with the idea that he meant what he said.'

'I wonder how far Zoe—his wife—knew of this?'

'I would rather not consider the question, Philippa. But, indeed, one cannot help, just at first, thinking about it, and I am compelled to believe that she was his servant and his agent throughout. I believe she was instigated to get money from me if she could, and I believe she knew his intentions as regards me, and that she consented. She must have known, and she must have consented.'

'She would excuse herself on the ground of being his wife. For their husbands some women will do anything. Perhaps she worships him. His genius, very likely, overshadows and awes her.' Armorel smiled, but made no objection to this conjecture. 'Some women worship the genius in a man as if it was the man himself. Some women worship the man quite apart from his genius. I used to worship Alec long before he was discovered to be a genius at all. When I was a school-

girl, Alec was my knight—my Galahad—purest-hearted and bravest of all the knights. There was no one in the world—no living man, and very few dead men—Bayard, Sidney, Charles the First, and two or three more only—who could stand beside him. He was so handsome, so brave, so great, and so good, that other men seemed small beside him. Well, my hero passed through Cambridge without the least distinction: I thought it was because he was too proud to show other men how easily he could beat them. Then he was called to the Bar, but he did not immediately show his eloquence and his abilities: that was because he wanted an opportunity. And then I went out into the world, and made the discovery that my hero was in reality quite an ordinary young man—rather big and good-looking, perhaps—with, as we all thought then, no very great abilities. And he certainly was always—and he is still—heavy in conversation. But he was still my cousin, though he ceased to be my hero. He was more than a cousin—he was almost my brother; and

brothers, as you do not know, perhaps, Armorel, sometimes do things which require vast quantities of patience and forgiveness. I am sure no girl's brother ever wanted forgiveness more than my cousin Alec.'

Her face, cold and pale, had, in fact, the sisterly expression. Philippa's enemies always declared that in the composition and making of her the goddess Venus, who presumably takes a large personal interest in the feminine department, had no lot or part at all. Yet certain words—the late companion's words—kept ringing in Armorel's ears: 'My dear, the woman loves him still. She has never ceased to love him.'

'There was nothing to forgive at first,' she went on: 'on the contrary, everything to admire. Yet his career has been throughout so unexpected as to puzzle and bewilder us. Consider, Armorel. Here was a young man who had never in boyhood, or later, shown the least love or leaning towards Art or the least tinge of poetical feeling, or the smallest power as a *raconteur*, or any charm of writing

—suddenly becoming a fine painter—a really fine painter—a respectable poet, and an admirable story-teller. When he began with the first picture there grew up in my head a very imaginative and certain set of ideas connecting the painter's mind with his Art. I saw a grave mind dwelling gravely and earnestly on the interpretation of nature. It seemed impossible that one who should so paint sea and shore should be otherwise than grave and serious.'

'Impossible,' said Armorel.

'What we had called, in our stupidity, dulness, now became only seriousness. He took his Art seriously. But then he began to write verses, and then I found that there was a new mind—not a part of the old mind, but a new mind altogether. It was a mind with a light vein of fancy and merriment: it was affectionate, sympathetic, and happy: and it seemed distinctly a feminine mind. I cannot tell you how difficult it was to fit that mind to my cousin Alec—it was like dressing him up in an ill-fitting woman's riding-habit.

And then he began those stories of his—and, behold, another mind altogether!—this time a worldly mind—cynical, sarcastic, distrustful, epigrammatic, and heartless—not at all a pleasant mind. So that you see I had four different minds all going about in the same set of bones—the original Alec Feilding, handsome and commonplace, but a man of honour: the serious student of Art: the light and gay-hearted poet, sparkling in his verses like a glass of champagne: and the cynical man of the world, who does not believe that there are any men of honour or any good women. Why, how can one man be at the same time four men? It is impossible. And now we have a fifth development of Alec. He has become—at the same time—a creature who marries a wife secretly—no one knows why: and hides her away for three years and then suddenly produces her—no one knows why. What does he hide her away for? Why does she consent to be hidden away? Then, the very day before he has got to produce his wife for all the world to see—I am perfectly

certain that she herself forced him to take that step—he makes love to a young lady, and formally asks her to marry him. Reconcile, if you can, all these contradictions.'

'They cannot possibly be reconciled.'

'We have heard of seven devils entering into one man; but never of angels and devils mixed, my dear. Such a man cannot be explained, any more than the Lady Melusina herself.'

'Do not let us try. As for me, I am going to forget the existence of Mr. Alec Feilding if I can. In order to do this the quicker I mean to go home and stay there. Come and see me on the island of Samson, Philippa. But you must not bring your father, or he may be disappointed at the loss of his ancestral hall. To you I shall not mind showing the little house where your ancestors lived.'

'I should like very much—above all things—to see the place.'

'I will bribe you to come. I have got a great silver punch-bowl—old silver, such as

you love—for you. You shall have a choice of rings, a choice of snuff-boxes. There is a roll of lace put away in the cupboard that would make you a lovely dress. It will be like the receiving of presents which we read of in the old books.'

'I will try to come, Armorel, after the season.'

Armorel laughed.

'There is the difference between us, Philippa. You belong to the world, and I do not. Oh! I will come back again some day and look at it again. But it will always be a strange land to me. You will leave London after the season; I am leaving it before the season. Come, however, when you can. Scilly is never too hot in summer nor too cold in winter. Instead of a carriage you shall have a boat, and instead of a coachman you shall have my boy Peter. We will sail about and visit the Islands: we will carry our midday dinner with us: and in the evening we will play and sing. Nobody will call upon you there: there are no dinner-

parties, and you need not bring an evening dress. The only audience to our music will be my old servants, Justinian, and Dorcas his wife, and Chessum, and Peter the boy.'

There were no preparations to make: there was nothing to prevent Armorel from going away immediately. She asked Effie to go with her. She opened the subject in the evening, when she and her brother and Roland were all sitting together in her drawing-room by the light of the fire alone, which she loved. They were thoughtful and rather silent, conscious of recent events.

'While we were in Regent Street this afternoon, Effie,' said Armorel, 'I was thinking of the many happy faces that we met. The street seemed filled with happiness. I was wondering if it was all real. Are they all as happy as they seem? Is there no falsehood in their lives? The streets are filled with happy people. The theatres are filled with happy faces: society shows none but happy faces. It ought to be the happiest of

worlds. Have we, alone, fallen among pretenders and intriguers?'

'They are gone from you, Armorel. Can you not forget them?' Effie murmured.

'I seem to hear the murmuring voice of my companion always. She whispers in her caressing voice, "Oh! my dear, he is so good and great! He is so full of truth and honour. Will you lend him a thousand pounds? He thinks so highly of you. A thousand pounds—two thousand pounds. If I had it to lay at the feet of so much genius!" And all the time she is his wife. And in my thoughts I am always hearing his voice, which I learned to hate, laying down a commonplace. And in my dreams I awake with a start, because he is making love to me while Zoe listens at the door.'

'You must go away somewhere,' said Roland.

'I shall go home—to my own place. Effie, will you come with me?'

'Go with you? Oh! To Scilly?'

'To the land of Lyonesse. I have arranged it all, dear. Archie shall have these rooms of mine to live in: you shall come with me. It is two years since you have been out of London: your cheeks are pale: you want our sea-breezes and our upland downs. Will you come with me, Effie?'

She held out her hand. 'I will go with you,' said the girl, 'round the whole world, if you order me.'

'Then that is settled. Archie, you must stay because your future demands it. I met Mr. Stephenson yesterday. He told me that he is in great hopes about the play, and that, meantime, he will be able to put some work into your hands.'

'You are always thinking about me,' said Archie.

'Come to us in the summer. Take your holiday on Samson. Oh! Effie, we will be perfectly happy. We will forget London, and everything that has happened. Thank Heaven, the rubies are gone! I will send

a piano there: we will carry with us loads of books and music. We will have a perfectly lovely time, with no one but ourselves. Roland will tell you how we will live. You will do nothing for a time, while you are drinking in the fresh air and getting strong. Then—then—you shall have ideas—great and glorious ideas—and you shall write far, far better poetry than any you have attempted yet.'

'And, meantime—we who have to remain behind?' asked Roland. 'What shall we do when you are gone?'

It takes longer to get to Penzance than to Edinburgh, because the train ceases to run and begins to crawl as soon as it leaves Plymouth. The best way is to take the nine-o'clock train and to travel all night. Then you will probably sleep from Reading to Bristol: from Bristol to Exeter: and from Exeter to Plymouth. After that you will keep awake.

In this way and by this train, Armorel

and Effie travelled to Penzance. Effie fell asleep very soon, and remained asleep all night long, waking up somewhere between Lostwithiel and Marazion. Armorel sat up wakeful the whole night through, yet was not tired in the morning. Partly, she was thinking of her stay in London, the crowning of her apprenticeship five years long. Nothing had happened as she had expected. Nothing, in this life, ever does. She had found the hero of her dreams defeated and fallen, a pitiable object. But he stood erect again, better armed and in better heart, his face turned upwards.

Partly, another thing filled her heart and made her wakeful.

Roland and Archie came with them to the station.

'Shall I ever be permitted to visit again the Land of Lyonesse?' whispered the former at the window just before the guard's whistle gave the signal for the train to start.

She gave him her hand. 'Good-bye,

Roland. You will come to Scilly—when you please—as soon as you can.'

He held her hand.

'I live only in that hope,' he replied.

The train began to move. He bent and kissed her fingers.

She leaned forward. 'Roland,' she said, 'I also live only in that hope.'

CHAPTER XXVI

NOT THE HEIR, AFTER ALL

The storm expended itself. The gale cannot go on blowing: the injured man cannot go on raging, cursing, or weeping. Alec Feilding became calm. Yet a settled gloom rested like a dark cloud upon his front: he had lost something—a good part—of his pristine confidence. That enviable quality which so much impresses itself upon others—called swagger—had been knocked out of him. Indeed, he had sustained a blow from which he would never wholly recover: such a man could never get over the loss of such a fortune: his great-grandfather, so far as could be learned, lost his fortune and began again, with cheerful heart. Alec would begin again, because he must, but with rage and bitter-

ness. It was like being struck down by an incurable disease: it might be alleviated, but it would never be driven out: from time to time, in spite of the physicians, the patient writhes and groans in the agony of this disease. So from time to time will this man, until the end of time, groan and lament over the wicked waste and loss of that superb inheritance.

Of course, he disguised from himself—this is one of the things men always do hide away—the fact that he himself was part and parcel of the deed: he had destroyed himself by his own craft and cunning. Had he not placed his wife with Armorel under instructions to persuade and coax her into advancing money for his own purposes, the thing could never have happened.

Henceforth, though the pair should have the desire of their hearts: though they should march on to wealth and success: though the wife should invent and contrive with the cleverness of ten for the good of the firm: though the husband should grow more

and more in the estimation of the outer world into the position of a Master and an Authority: between the two will lie the memory of fraud and crime, to divide them and keep them apart.

On the day after the revelation, a thought came into the mind of the inheritor of the rubies. The thing that had happened unto him—could he cause it to happen unto another? Perhaps one remembers how, on learning that the rubies were to be given to the eldest grandson of the second daughter, he had dropped, limp and pale, into a chair. One may also remember how, on learning that no further investigation would be made, he recovered again. The fact was, you see, that Mr. Jagenal had made a little mistake. His searchers had altered the order of the three sisters. Frances, Alec Feilding's grandmother, was not the second, but the third daughter. When the rubies were actually waiting and ready for him, it would have been foolish to mention that fact, especially as no further search was to be made, and the

elder branch, wherever it was, would never know anything of the matter at all. Therefore, he then held his tongue.

Now, on the other hand, the jewels being worthless, he thought, first of all, that it would look extremely scrupulous to inform Mr. Jagenal of the discovery that his grandmother was really the third daughter: next, if the other branch should be discovered, the fortunate heir would, like himself, be raised to the heavens only to be dashed down again to earth. Let someone else, as well as himself, experience the agonies of that fall. He chuckled grimly as he considered the torments in store for this fortunate unknown cousin. As for danger to his wife, he considered rightly that there was none: the stones had been consigned to the bank by Armorel, and in her own name: she signed an order for their delivery to Mr. Jagenal: he had kept them in his safe. They would certainly lie there some time before he found the new heir. Nay. They had been in his custody for five years before he gave them

over formally to Armorel. Who could say when the robbery had been effected? Who would think of asking the bank whether during the short time the parcel was held in the name of Armorel it had been taken out? Clearly the whole blame and responsibility lay with Mr. Jagenal himself. He would have a very curious problem to solve—namely, how the rubies had been changed in his own safe.

'Well, Alec, come to take away your rubies?' asked Mr. Jagenal, cheerily. 'There they are in that safe.'

'No,' he replied, sadly. 'I am grieved indeed to say that I have not come for the rubies. I shall never come for the rubies.'

'Why not?'

'Because they are not for me. According to your instructions, I have no claim to them.'

'No claim?'

'I understand that Miss Rosevean intends to give these jewels to the first representative

of the family of Robert Fletcher. That is to say, to the eldest grandchild of the first, second, or third daughter, as the case may be?'

'That is so.'

'Very well. The eldest daughter left no children. You therefore sent for me as the eldest—and only—grandchild of the second daughter?'

'I did.'

'Then I have to tell you that you are wrong. My grandmother was the third daughter.'

'Is it possible?'

'Quite possible. She was the third daughter. I was not very accurately acquainted with that part of my genealogy, and the other day I could not have told you whether I came from the second or the third daughter. I have since ascertained the facts. It was the second daughter who went away to Australia or New Zealand, or somewhere. I do not know anything at

all about my cousins, but I think it very unlikely that there are none in existence.'

'Very unlikely. What proof have you that your grandmother was the second daughter?'

'I have an old family bible—I can show it you, if you like. In this has been entered the date of the birth, the place and date of baptism, the names of the sponsors of all three sisters. There is also a note on the second sister's marriage and on her emigration. I assure you there can be no doubt on the subject at all.'

'Oh! This is very disastrous, my dear boy. How could my people have made such a mistake? Alec, I feel for you—I do, indeed!'

'It is most disastrous!' Alec echoed with a groan. 'I have been in the unfortunate position of a man who is suddenly put into possession of a great fortune one day, and as suddenly deprived of it the next. Of course, as soon as I discovered the real facts, it became my duty to acquaint you with them.'

'By George!' cried Mr. Jagenal. 'If you had kept the facts to yourself, no one would ever have been any wiser. No one, because the transfer of the property is a sheer gift made by my client to you without any compulsion at all. It is a private transaction of which I should never have spoken to anyone. Well, Alec, I must not say that you are wrong. But many men—most men perhaps—with a less keen sense of honour than you—well—I say no more. Yet the loss and disappointment must be a bitter pill for you.'

'It is a bitter pill,' he replied truthfully. 'More bitter than you would suspect.'

'You will have the satisfaction of feeling that you have behaved in this matter as a man of the strictest honour.'

'I am very glad, considering all things, that I have not had the rubies in my own possession, even for a single hour.'

'That is nothing: of course they would have been safe in your hands. Well, Alec, I am sorry for you. But you are young: you

are clever: you are succeeding hand over hand: pay a little more attention to your daily expenses, put down your horses and live for a few years quietly, and you will make your own fortune—ay, a fortune greater far than was contained in this unlucky case of precious stones.'

'I suppose you will renew your search, now, after the descendants of the second daughter?'

'I suppose we must. Do not forget that if there are no descendants—or, which is much the same thing, if we cannot find them in a reasonable time, I shall advise my client to transfer the jewels to the grandson of the third daughter. And I hope, my dear boy—I hope, I say, that we may never find those descendants.'

Alec departed, a little cheered by the consolation that he had passed on the disappointment to another.

He went home, and found his wife in the studio, apparently waiting for him. There were dark rings round her eyes. She had

been weeping. Since the storm they had not spoken to each other.

He sat down at his table—it was perfectly bare of papers—no sign of any work at all upon it—and waited for her to begin.

'Is it not time,' she asked, 'that this should cease? You have reproached me enough, I think. Remember, we are on the same level. But, whatever I have done, it was done for your sake. Whatever you have done, was done for your own sake. Now, is there going to be an end to this situation?'

He made a gesture of impatience.

'Understand clearly—if I am to help you for the future: if I am going to pull you through this crisis: if I am to direct and invent and combine for you, I mean to be treated with the semblance of kindness—the show of politeness at least.'

He sat up, moved by this appeal, which, indeed was to his purse—that is, to his heart.

'I say, my husband,' she repeated, 'you must understand me clearly. Again, what I

have done was done for you—for you. Unless you agree to my conditions it shall have been done—for myself. I have four thousand pounds in the bank in my own name. You cannot touch it. I shall go away and live upon that money—apart from you. And you shall have nothing—nothing—unless——'

'Unless what?' He shook off his wrath with a mighty effort, as a sulky boy shakes off his sulks when he perceives that he must, and that instantly. He threw off his wrath and sat up with a wan semblance of a smile, a spectral smile, feebly painted on his lips. 'Unless what, Zoe? My dear child, can you not make allowance for a man tried in this terrible fashion? I don't believe that any man was ever so mocked by Fortune. I have been crushed. Yes, any terms, any condition you please. Let us forget the past. Come, dear, let us forget what has happened.' He sprang to his feet and held out his arms.

She hesitated a moment. 'There is no other place for me now,' she murmured.

'We are on the same level. I am all yours —now.'

Then she drew herself away, and turned again to the table. 'Come, Alec,' she said, 'to business. Time presses. Sit down, and give me all your attention.'

CHAPTER XXVII

THE DESERT ISLAND

THE train proceeded slowly along the head of Mount's Bay, the waters of the high tide washing up almost to the sleepers on the line. Armorel let down the window and looked out across the bay—

> Where the great vision of the guarded Mount
> Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold.

'See, Effie!' she cried. 'There is Mount's Bay. There is the Lizard. There is Penzance. And there—oh! there is the Mount itself!'

St. Michael's Mount, always weird and mysterious, rose out of the waters wrapped in a thin white cloud, which the early sun had not yet been able to dissipate. I am told

there is a very fine modern house upon the Mount. I prefer not to believe that story. The place should always remain lonely, awful, full of mystery and wonder. There is also said to be a battery with guns upon it. Perhaps. But there are much more wonderful things than these to tell of the rock. Upon its highest point those gallant miners—Captain Caractac and Captain Caerleon, both of Boadicea Wheal—were wont to stand gazing out upon the stretch of waters expecting the white sails and flashing oars of the Phœnician fleet, come to buy their white and precious tin, with strong wines from Syria and spices from the far East, and purple robes and bronze swords and spearheads, far better than those made by Flint Jack of the Ordnance Department. Hither came white-robed priests with flowing beards and solemn faces—faces supernaturally solemn, till they were alone upon the rock. Then, perhaps, an eyelid trembled. What they did I know not, nor did the people, but it was something truly awful, with majestic rites and ineffable mys-

teries and mumbo-jumbo of the very noblest. Here St. Michael himself once, in the ages of Faith, condescended to appear. It was to a hermit. Such appearances were the prizes of the profession. Many went a-hermiting in hopes of getting a personal call from a Saint who would otherwise have fought and lived and died quite like the rest of the world. And, indeed, there were so many Cornish Saints—such as St. Buryan, St. Levan, St. Ives, St. Just, St. Keverne, St. Anthony, not to speak of St. Erth, St. Gulval, St. Austell, St. Wenn—all kindly disposed saints, anxious to encourage hermits, and pleased to extend their own sphere of usefulness, that few of these holy men were disappointed.

In the bay the blue water danced lightly in the morning breeze: the low, level sunlight shone upon Penzance on the western side: the fishing-boats, back from the night's cruise, lay at their moorings, their brown sails lowered: the merchant-men and trading craft were crowded in the port: beyond, the white curves chased each other across the water,

and showed that, outside, the breeze was fresh and the water lively.

'We are almost at home,' said Armorel. 'There is our steamer lying off the quay—she looks very little, doesn't she? Only a short voyage of forty miles—oh! Effie, I do hope you are a good sailor—and we shall be at Hugh Town.'

'Are we really arrived? I believe I have slept the whole night through,' said Effie, sitting up and pulling herself straight. 'Oh! how lovely!'—as she too looked out of window. 'Have you slept well, Armorel?'

'I don't think I have been asleep much. But I am quite happy, Effie, dear—quite as happy as if I had been sound asleep all night. There are dreams, you know, which come to people in the night when they are awake as well as when they are asleep. I have been dreaming all night long—one dream which lasted all the night—one voice in my ears—one hand in mine. Oh! Effie, I have been quite happy!' She showed her happiness by kissing her companion. 'I am happier than

I ever thought to be. Some day, perhaps, I shall be able to tell you why.'

And then the train rolled in to Penzance Station.

It was only half past seven in the morning. The steamer would not start till half past ten. The girls sent their luggage on board, and then went to one of the hotels which stand all in a row facing the Esplanade. Here they repaired the ravages of the night, which makes even a beautiful girl like Armorel show like Beauty neglected, and then they took breakfast, and, in due time, went on board.

Now behold! They had left in London a pitiless nor'-easter and a black sky. They found at Penzance a clear blue overhead, light and sunshine, and a glorious north-westerly breeze. That is not, certainly, the quarter whose winds allay the angry waves and soothe the heaving surge. Not at all. It is when the wind is from the north-west that the waves rise highest and heaviest. Then the boat bound to Scilly tosses and rolls

like a round cork, yet persistently forces her way westward, diving, ploughing, climbing, slipping, sliding, and rolling, shipping great seas and shaking them off again, always getting ahead somehow. Then those who come forth at the start with elastic step and lofty looks lie low and wish that some friend would prod Father Time with a bradawl and make him run: and those who enjoy the sea, Sir, and are never sick, are fain to put down the pipe with which they proudly started and sink into nothingness. For taking the conceit out of a young man there is nothing better than the voyage from Penzance to Scilly, especially if it be a tripper's voyage—that is, back again the same day.

There is, on the Scilly boat, a cabin, or rather a roofed and walled apartment, within which is the companion to the saloon. Nobody ever goes into the saloon, though it is magnificent with red velvet, but round this roofed space there is a divan or sofa. And here lie the weak and fearful, and all those who give in and oppose no further resistance

to the soft influences of ocean. Effie lay here, white of cheek and motionless. She had never been on the sea before, and she had a rough and tumbling day to begin with, and the sea in glory and grandeur—but all was lost and thrown away so far as she was concerned. Armorel stood outside, holding to the ropes with both hands. She was dressed in a waterproof: the spray flew over her: her cheek was wet with it: her eyes were bright with it: the heavy seas dashed over her: she laughed and shook her waterproof: as for wet boots, what Scillonian regardeth them? And the wind—how it blew through and through her! How friendly was its rough welcome! How splendid to be once more on rough water, the boat fighting against a head wind and rolling waves! How glorious to look out once more upon the wild ungoverned waves!

It was not until the boat had rounded the Point and was well out in the open that these things became really enjoyable. Away south stood the Wolf with its tall lighthouse: you

could see the white waves boiling and fighting around it and climbing halfway up. Beyond the Wolf a great ocean steamer plunged through the water outward bound. Presently there came flying past them the most beautiful thing ever invented by the wit of man or made by his craft, a three masted schooner under full sail—all sails spread—not forging slowly along under poverty-stricken stays which proclaim an insufficient crew, but flying over the water under all her canvas. She was a French boat, of Havre.

'There is Scilly, Miss,' said the steward, pointing out to sea.

Yes; low down the land lay, west by north. It looked like a cloud at first. Every moment it grew clearer; but always low down. What one sees at first are the eastern shores of St. Agnes and Gugh, St. Mary's, and the Eastern Islands. They are all massed together, so that the eye cannot distinguish one from the other, but all seem to form continuous land. By degrees they separated. Then one could discover the South Channel

and the North Channel. When the tide is high and the weather fair the boat takes the former: at low tide, the latter. To-day the captain chose the South Channel. And now they were so near the land that Armorel could make out Porthellick Bay, and her heart beat, though she was going home to no kith or kin, and to nothing but her *familia*, her serving folk. Next she made out Giants' Castle, then the Old Town, then Penimnis Head, black and threatening. And now they were so near that every carn and every boulder upon it could be made out clearly: and one could see the water rising and falling at the foot of the rock, and hear it roaring as it was driven into the dark caves and the narrow places where the rocks opened out and made make-believe of a port or haven of refuge. And now Portheressa Bay, and now the Garrison, and smooth water.

Then Armorel brought out Effie, pale and languid. 'Now, dear, the voyage is over: we are in smooth water, and shall be in port in ten minutes. Look round—it is all over:

we are in the Road. And over there—see!—with his twin hills—is my dear old Samson.'

There was a little crowd on the quay waiting to see the boat arrive. All of them—boatmen, fishermen, and flower-farmers' men, to say nothing of those representing the interests of commerce—pressed forward to welcome Armorel. Everybody remembered her, but now she was a grand young lady who had left them a simple child. They shook hands with her and stepped aside. And then Peter came forward, looking no older but certainly no younger, and Armorel shook hands with him too. He had the boat alongside, and in five minutes more the luggage was on board, the mast was up, the sail set, and Armorel was sitting in her old place, the strings in her hand, while Peter held the rope and looked out ahead, shading his eyes with his right hand in the old familiar style.

'It is as if I never left home at all,' said Armorel. 'I sailed like this with Peter yesterday—and the day before.'

'You've growed,' said Peter, after an inquiring gaze, being for the moment satisfied that there was nothing ahead and that there was no immediate danger of shipwreck on the Nut Rock or Green Island.

'I am five years older,' Armorel replied.

'It's been a rare harvest this year,' he went on. 'I thought we should never come to the end of the daffodils.'

'Now I am at home indeed,' said Armorel, 'when I hear the old, old talk about the flowers. To-morrow, Effie, I will show you our little fields where we grow all the lovely flowers—the anemone and jonquil—the narcissus and the daffodil. This afternoon, when we have had dinner and rested a little, I will take you all round Samson and show you the glories of the place: they are principally views of other islands: but there is a headland and two bays, and there are the Tombs of the Kings—the Ancient Kings of Lyonesse—in one of them Roland Lee'—she blushed and turned away her head—henceforth, she understood, this was a name to be treated

with more reverence—'found a golden torque, which you have seen me wear. And oh! my dear—you shall be so happy: the seabreeze shall fill your soul with music: the seabirds shall sing to you: the very waves shall lap on the shore in rhyme and rhythm for you: and the sun of Scilly, which is so warm and glowing, but never too warm, shall colour that pale cheek of yours, and fill out that spare form. And oh, Effie! I hope you will not get tired of Samson and of me! We are two maidens living on a desert island: there is nobody to talk to except each other: we shall wander about together as we list. Oh, I am so happy, Effie!—and oh, my dear, I am so hungry!'

The boat ran up over the white sand of the beach. They jumped out, and Armorel, leaving Peter to bring along the trunks by the assistance of the donkey, led the way over the southern hill to Holy Farm.

'Effie,' she said, 'I have been tormented this morning with the fear that everything would look small. I was afraid that my old

memories—a child's memories—would seem distorted and exaggerated. Now I am not in the least afraid. Samson has got all his acres still: he looks quite as big and quite as homely as ever he did—the boulders are as huge, the rocks are as steep. I remember every boulder, Effie, and every bush, and every patch of brown fern, and almost every trailing branch of bramble. How glorious it is here! How the seabreeze sweeps across the hill—it comes all the way from America—across the Atlantic! Effie, I declare you are looking rosier already. I must sing—I must, indeed—I always used to sing!——' She threw up her arms in the old gesture, and sang a loud and clear and joyous burst of song—sang like the lark springing from the ground, because it cannot choose but sing. 'I used to jump, too; but I do not want, somehow, to jump any more. Ah, Effie, I was quite certain there would be some falling-off, but I could not tell in what direction. I can no longer jump. That comes of getting old. To be sure, I did not jump when I took Roland Lee

about the islands. Sometimes I sang, but I was ashamed to jump. Here we are upon the top. It is not a mighty Alp, is it?—but it serves. Look round—but only for a moment, because Chessun will have dinner waiting for us, and you are exhausted by your bad passage—you poor thing. This is our way, down the narrow lanes. Here our fields begin: they are each about as big as a dinner-table. See the tall hedges to keep off the north wind: there is a field of narcissus, but there are no more flowers, and the leaves are dying away. This way! Ah! Here we are!'

The house did not look in the least mean, or any smaller than Armorel expected. She became even prouder of it. Where else could one find a row of palms, with great verbena-trees and prickly pear and aloes, not to speak of the creepers over the porch, the gilt figure-head, and the big ship's lantern hung in the porch? Within, the sunlight poured into the low rooms—all of them looking south—and made them bright: in the room where formerly the ancient lady passed

her time in the hooded chair—the lady passed away and the chair gone—the cloth was spread for dinner. And in the porch were gathered the serving-folk—Justinian not a day older, Dorcas unchanged, and Chessun thin and worn, almost as old, to look at, as her mother. And as soon as the greetings were over, and the questions asked and answered, and the news told of the harvest and the prices, and the girls had run all over the house, Chessun brought in the dinner.

It is a blessed thing that we must eat, because upon this necessity we have woven so many pretty customs. We eat a welcome home: we eat a godspeed: we eat together because we love each other: we eat to celebrate anything and everything. Above all, upon such an event as the return of one who has long been parted from us we make a little banquet. Thought and pains had been bestowed upon the dinner which Chessun placed upon the table. Dorcas stood by the table, watching the effect of her cares. First there was a chicken roasted, with bread crumbs—a

bird blessed with a delicacy of flavour and a tenderness of flesh and a willingness to separate at the joints unknown beyond the shores of Scilly: Dorcas said so, and the girls believed it—Effie, at least, willing to believe that nothing in the world was so good as in this happy realm of Queen Armorel. Dorcas also invited special attention to the home-cured ham, which was, she justly remarked, mild as a peach: the potatoes, served in their skins, were miracles of mealiness—had Armorel met with such potatoes out of Samson? had the young lady, her visitor, ever seen or dreamed of such potatoes? There was spinach grown on the farm, freshly cut, redolent of the earth, fragrant with the seabreeze. And there was home-made bread, sweet, wholesome, and firm. There was also placed upon the table a Brown George, filled with home-brewed, furnished with a head snow-white, venerable, and benevolent, such a head as not all the breweries of Burton—or even of the whole House of Lords combined—could furnish. Alas! that head smiled in vain upon this degenerate pair.

They would not drink the nut-brown, sparkling beer. It was not wasted, however. Peter had it when he brought the pack-ass to the porch laden with the last trunk. Nor did they so much as remove the stopper from the decanter containing a bottle of the famous blackberry wine, the primest *crû* of Samson, opened expressly for this dinner. Yet this was not wasted either, for Justinian, who knew a glass of good wine, took it with three successive suppers. Is it beneath the dignity of history to mention pudding? Consider: pudding is festive: pudding contributes largely to the happiness of youth. Armorel and Effie tackled the pudding as only the young and hungry can. And this day, perhaps from the promptings of simple piety, being rejoiced that Armorel was back again; perhaps from some undeveloped touch of poetry in her nature, Chessun placed upon the table that delicacy seldom seen at the tables of the unfortunate Great—who really get so few of the good things—known as Grateful Pudding. You know the ingredients of this delightful

dish? More. To mark the day, Chessun actually made it with cream instead of milk!

'To-morrow,' said Armorel, fired with emulation, 'I will show you, Effie, what I can do in the way of puddings and cakes. I always used to make them: and, unless my lightness of hand has left me, I think you will admire my teacakes, if not my puddings. Roland Lee praised them both. But, to be sure, he was so easily pleased. He liked everything on the island. He even liked—oh! Effie!—he liked me.'

'That was truly wonderful, Armorel.'

'Now, Effie, dear, lie down in this chair beside the window. You can look straight out to sea—that is Bishop's Rock, with its lighthouse. Lie down and rest, and I will talk to you about Scilly and Samson and my own people. Or I will play to you if you like. I am glad the new piano has arrived safely.'

'I like to look round this beautiful old room. How strange it is! I have never seen such a room—with things so odd.'

'They are all things from foreign lands,

and things cast up by the sea. If you like odd things I will show you, presently, my punch-bowls and the snuff-boxes and watches and things. I did not give all of them to the care of Mr. Jagenal five years ago'

'It is wonderful: it is lovely: as if one could ever tire of such a place!'

'Lie down, dear, and rest. You have had such a tossing about that you must rest after it, or you may be ill. It promises to be a fine and clear evening. If it is we will go out by-and-by and see the sun set behind the Western Rocks.'

'We are on a desert island,' Effie murmured obediently, lying down and closing her eyes. 'Nobody here but ourselves: we can do exactly what we please: think of it, Armorel! Nobody wants any money, here: nobody jostles his neighbour: nobody tramples upon his friend. It is like a dream of the primitive life.'

'With improvements, dear Effie. My ancestors used to lead the primitive life when Samson was a holy island and the cemetery of

the Kings of Lyonesse : they went about barefooted and they were dressed in skins : they fought the wolves and bears, and if they did not kill the creatures, why, the creatures killed them : they were always fighting the nearest tribe. And they sucked the marrow-bones, Effie, think of that! Oh! we have made a wonderful advance in the civilisation of Samson Island.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT HOME

'I AM so very pleased to see *you* here, Mr. Stephenson.' Mrs. Feilding welcomed him with her sweetest and most gracious smile. 'To attract our few really sincere critics—there are so many incompetent pretenders—as well as the leaders in all the Arts is my great ambition. And now you have come.'

'You are very kind,' said Dick, blushing. I dare say he is a really great critic at the hours when he is not a most superior clerk in the Admiralty. At the same time, one is not often told the whole, the naked, the gratifying truth.

'To have a *salon*, that is my desire: to fill it with men of light and leading. Now you have broken the ice, you will come often, will

you not? Every Sunday evening, at least. My husband will be most pleased to find you here.'

'Again, you are very kind.'

'We saw you yesterday afternoon at that poor boy's *matinée*; did we not? The crush was too great for us to exchange a word with you. What do you think of the piece?'

'I always liked it. I was present, you know, at the reading that night.'

'Oh yes; the reading—Armorel Rosevean's Reading. Yes. Though that hardly gave one an idea of the play.'

'The piece went very well indeed. I should think it will catch on; but of course the public are very capricious. One never knows whether they will take to a thing or not. To my mind there is every prospect of success. In any case, young Wilmot has shown that he possesses poetical and dramatic powers of a very high order indeed. He seems the most promising of the men before us at present. That is, if he keeps up to the standard of this first effort.'

'Ye—es? Of course we must discount some of the promise. You have heard, for instance, that my husband lent his advice and assistance?'

'He said so, after the reading, did he not?'

'Nobody knows, Mr. Stephenson,' she clasped her hands and turned those eyes of limpid blue upon the young man, 'how many successes my husband has helped to make by his timely assistance! What he did to this particular play I do not know, of course. During the reading and during yesterday's performance, I seemed to hear his voice through all the acts. It haunted me. But Alec said nothing. He sat in silence, smiling, as if he had never heard the words before. Oh! It is wonderful! And now—not a word of recognition! You help people to climb up, and then they pretend—they pretend—to have got up by their own exertions! Not that Alec expects gratitude or troubles himself much about these things, but, naturally, I feel hurt. And oh! Mr. Stephenson, what

must be the conscience of the man—how can he bear to live—who goes about the world pretending—pretending,' she shook her head sadly, 'pretending to have written other men's works!'

'Men will do anything, I suppose. This kind of assistance ought, however, to be recognised. I will make some allusion to it in my notice of the play. Meantime, if I can read the future at all, Master Archie Wilmot's fortune is made, and he will.'

'Mr. Roland Lee showed his picture that night. He had just come out of a madhouse, had he not?'

'Not quite that. He failed, and dropped out. But what he did with himself or how he lived for three years I do not exactly know. He has returned, and never alludes to that time.'

'And he exactly imitates my husband, I am told.'

'No, no—not exactly. The resemblance is close, only an experienced critic'—Oh! Dick Stephenson!—'could discern the real

differences of treatment.' Mrs. Feilding smiled. 'But I knew him before he disappeared, and I assure you his method was then the same as it is now. Very much like your husband's style, yet with a difference.'

'I am glad there is a difference. An artist ought, at least, to have a style of his own. You know, I suppose, that Armorel has gone away?'

'I have heard so.'

'It became possible for us at last to acknowledge things. So I joined my husband. Armorel went home—to her own home in the Scilly Islands. She took Effie Wilmot with her. Indeed, the girl's flatteries have become necessary to her. I fear she was unhappy, poor child! I sometimes think, Mr. Stephenson, that she saw too much of Alec. Of course he was a good deal with us, and I could not tell her the whole truth, and—and—girls' heads are easily turned, you know, when genius seems to be attracted. Poor Armorel!' she sighed, playing with her fan. 'Time, I dare say, will help her to forget.'

'It is a pity,' said Dick Stephenson, changing the subject, because he did not quite believe this version, 'it is a pity that Mr. Feilding, who can give such admirable advice to a young dramatist, does not write a play himself.'

'Hush!' she looked all round, 'nobody is listening. Alec *has* written a play, Mr. Stephenson. It is a three-act drama — a tragedy—strong—oh! so strong—so strong!' She clasped her hands again, letting the fan dangle from her wrist. 'So effective! I don't know when I have seen a play with more striking situations. It is accepted. But not a word has yet been said about it.'

'May I say something about it? Will you let me be the first to announce it, and to give some little account of it?'

'I will ask Alec. If he consents, I will tell you more about the play. And, my dear Mr. Stephenson, you, one of our old friends, really ought to do some work for the paper.'

'I have not been asked,' he replied, colouring, for he was still at that stage when

the dramatic critic is flattered by being invited to write for a paper.

'You shall be. How do you like the paper?'

'It has so completely changed its character, one would think that the whole staff had been changed. Everybody reads it now, and everybody takes it, I believe.'

'The circulation has gone up by leaps and bounds. It is really wonderful. But, Mr. Stephenson, here is one of the reasons. Give me a little credit—poor me! I cannot write, but I can look on, and I have a pair of eyes, and I can see things. Now, I saw that Alec was killing himself with writing. Every week a story; also, every week, a poem; every week an original article; and then those notes. I made him stop. I said to him, "Stamp your own individuality on every line of the paper; but write it yourself no longer. Edit it." You see, it is not as if Alec had to prove his powers: he has proved them already. So he can afford to let others do the hard work, while he adds the magic touch—

the touch of genius—that touch that goes to the heart. And the result you see.'

'Yes; the brightest — cleverest — most varied paper that exists.'

'With a large staff. Formerly Alec and one or two others formed the whole staff. Well, Mr. Stephenson, I know that Alec is going to ask you to do some of the dramatic criticism, and if you consent I shall be very pleased to have been the first to mention it.'

It will be understood from this conversation that the new methods of managing the business of the Firm were essentially different from the old. The paper had taken a new departure: it prospered. It was understood that the editor put less of his own work into it; but the articles, verses, and stories were all unsigned, and no one could tell exactly which were his papers: therefore, as all were clever, his reputation remained on the same level. Also, there was a thick and solid mass of advertisements each week, which represented public confidence widespread and deep.

'Give me,' cries the proprietor of a paper, 'the confidence of advertisers. That is proof enough of popularity.'

Mrs. Feilding moved to another part of the room, and began to talk with another man.

'My husband,' she said, 'has prepared a little surprise for us this evening. I say for us, because I have not seen what he has to show—since it came back from the frame-maker.'

'It is a picture, then?'

'A picture in a new style. He has abandoned for a time his coast and seashore studies. This is in quite a new style. I think—I hope—that it will be liked as well as his old.'

'He is indeed a wonderful man!'

'Is he not?' She laughed—a low and musical—a contented and a happy laugh. 'Is he not? You never know what Alec may be going to do next.'

Mrs. Feilding's Sundays have already

become a great success: such a success as a woman of the world may desire, and a clever woman can achieve. There is once more, as she says proudly, a *salon* in London. If it does not quite take the lead that she pretends in Art and Letters, it is always full. Men who go there once, go again: they find the kind of entertainment that they like: plenty of people for talk, to begin with. Then, every man is made, by the hostess, to feel that his own position in the literary and artistic world is above even his own estimate: that is soothing: in fact, the note of the *salon* is appreciation—not mutual admiration, as the envious do enviously affirm. Moreover, everybody in the *salon* has done something—perhaps not much, but something. And then the place is one where the talk is delightfully free, almost as free as in a club smoking-room. Every evening, again, there is some kind of entertainment, but not too much, because the *salon* has to keep up its reputation for conversation, and music destroys conversation. 'Let us,' said Mrs. Feilding, 'revive the dead art of

conversation. Let the men in this room make their reputation as they did a hundred years ago, for brilliant talk.' I have not heard that Mrs. Feilding has yet developed a talker like the mighty men of old: perhaps one will come along later: those, however, who have looked into the subject with an ambition in that line, and have ascertained the nature of the epigrams, repartees, retorts, quips, jokes, and personal observations attributed to Messrs. Douglas Jerrold and his brilliant circle are doubtful of reviving that Art except in a modified and a greatly chastened, even an effeminate form.

The entertainments provided by Mrs. Feilding consisted of a little music or a little singing—always by a young and little-known professional: there was generally something in the fashion—young lady with a banjo or a tum-tum, or anything which was popular: young gentleman to whistle: young actor or actress to give a character sketch: sometimes a picture sent in for private exhibition: sometimes a little poem printed for the evening

and handed about—one never knew what would be done.

But always the hostess would be gracious, winning, caressing, smiling, and talking incessantly: always she would be gliding about the room, making her friends talk: the happy wife of the most accomplished and most versatile man in London. And always that illustrious genius himself, calm and grave, taking Art seriously, laying down with authority the opinion that should be held to a circle who surrounded him. The circle consisted chiefly of women and of young men. Older men, with that reluctance to listen to the voice of Authority which distinguishes many after thirty, held aloof and talked with each other. 'Alec Feilding,' said one of them, expressing the general opinion, 'may be a mighty clever fellow, but he talks like a dull book. You've heard it all before. And you've heard it better put. It's wonderful that such a clever dog should be such a dull dog.'

They came, however, in spite of the dul-

ness: the wife would have carried off a hundred dull dogs.

As in certain earlier and better-known circles, the men greatly outnumbered the women. 'I am not in love with my own sex,' said Mrs. Feilding, quite openly. 'I prefer the society of men.' But some women came of their own accord, and some were brought by their fathers, husbands, lovers, and brothers. No one could say that ladies kept away from Mrs. Feilding's Sunday evenings.

This evening, the principal thing was the uncovering of a new picture—Mr. Feilding's new picture.

At ten o'clock the painter-poet, in obedience to a whisper from his wife, moved slowly, followed by his ring of disciples—male and female—all young—a callow brood—to the upper end of the room, where was an easel. A picture stood upon it, but a large green cloth was thrown over it.

'I thought,' said Mr. Alec Feilding, in his most dignified manner, 'that you would like to see this picture before anyone else. It is

one of the little privileges of our Sunday evenings to show things to each other. Some of you may remember,' he said, with the true humility of genius, 'that I have exhibited, hitherto, chiefly pictures of coast scenery. I have always been of opinion that a man should not confine himself to one class of subjects. His purchasing public may demand it, but the true artist should disregard all and any considerations connected with money.'

'Your true artist hasn't always got a weekly journal to fall back upon,' growled a young A.R.A. who did stick to one class of subjects. He had been brought there. As a rule, artists are not found at Mrs. Feilding's, nor do they rally round the cleverest man in London.

'I say,' repeated the really great man, 'that the wishes of buyers must not be weighed for an instant in comparison with the true interests of Art.'

'Like a copy-book,' murmured the Associate.

'Therefore, I have attempted a new line altogether. I have made new studies. They have cost a great deal of time and trouble and anxious thought. It is quite a new departure. I anticipate, beforehand, what you will say at first. But—Eccolo!'

He lifted the green cloth. At the same moment his wife turned up a light that stood beside the painting. He disclosed a really very beautiful painting: a group of trees beside a shallow pool of water: the trees were leafless: a little snow lay at their roots: the pool was frozen over: there was a little mist over the ground, and between the trunks one saw the setting sun.

'By Jove! It's a Belgian picture!' cried the Associate. And, indeed, you may see hundreds of pictures exactly in this style in the Brussels galleries, where the artists are never tired of painting the flat country and the trees, at every season and under every light.

'Precisely,' said the painter. 'That is the remark which I anticipated. Let us call

it—if you like—a Belgian picture. The subject is English: the treatment, perhaps, Belgian. For my part, I am not too proud to learn something from the Belgians.'

The Associate touched the man nearest him—an artist, not yet an Associate—by the arm.

'Ghosts!' he murmured. 'Spooks and ghosts!'

'Spectres!' replied the other. 'Phantoms and bogies!'

'A Haunted Studio!' said the Associate. 'My knees totter! My hair stands on end!'

'I tremble—I have goose-flesh!' replied his friend.

'Let us—let us run to the Society of Psychical Research!' whispered the Associate.

'Let us swiftly run!' said the other.

They fled, swiftly and softly. Only Mrs. Feilding observed their flight. She also gathered from their looks the subject of their talk. And she resolved that she would not, henceforth, encourage artists at her Sunday

evenings. She turned to Dick Stephenson.

'You, Mr. Stephenson,' she said, 'who are a true critic and understand work, tell me what *you* think of the picture.'

The great critic—he was not really a humbug: he was very fond of looking at pictures; only, you see, he was not an artist—advanced to the front, bent forward, considered a few moments, and then spoke.

'A dexterous piece of work—truly dexterous in the highest sense: full of observation intelligently and poetically rendered: careful: truthful: with intense feeling. I could hardly have believed that any English painter was capable of work in this *genre*.'

The people all gazed upon the canvas with rapt admiration: they murmured that it was wonderful and beautiful. Then Alec covered up the picture, and somebody began to play something.

'Alec,' said Mr. Jagenal, who seldom

came to these gatherings, 'I congratulate you. Your picture is very good. And in a new style. When will you be content to settle down in the jog-trot that the British public love?'

'Let me change my subject sometimes. When I am tired of trees I will go back, perhaps to the coast and seapieces.'

'Ah! But take care. There's a fellow coming along—— By the way, Alec, I have made a discovery lately.'

'What is it?'

'About those rubies. Why, man'—for Alec turned suddenly pale—'you remember that business still?'

'Indeed I do,' he replied. 'And I am not likely to forget it in a hurry.'

'My dear boy, to paint such pictures is worth many such bags of precious stones, if you will only think so.'

'What's your discovery?' Alec asked hoarsely.

'Well; I have found, quite accidentally,

the eldest grandchild of the second daughter —your great-aunt.'

'Oh!' Again he changed colour. 'Then you will, I suppose, hand him over the things.'

'Yes, certainly. I have sent for him. He does not yet know what I want him for. And I shall give him the jewels in obedience to Armorel's instructions. Alec, I have always been desperately sorry for your unfortunate discovery.'

'It caused a pang, certainly. And who is my cousin?'

'Well, Alec, I will not tell you until I have made quite sure. Not that there is any doubt. But I had better not. You will perhaps like to make his acquaintance. Perhaps you know him already. I don't say, mind.'

'Well, Sir,' said Alec, 'when he realises the extent and value of this windfall, I expect he will show a depth of gratitude which will astonish you. I do, indeed.'

'Zoe,' he said, when everybody was gone, 'are you quite sure that in the matter of those rubies your action can never be discovered?'

'Anything may be discovered. But I think—I believe—that it will be difficult. Why?'

'Because my cousin, the grandson of Robert Fletcher's second daughter, has been found, and he will receive the jewels to-morrow. And when he finds out what they are worth——'

'Then, Alec, it will be asked who had the jewels. They were taken to the bank by Mr. Jagenal and taken thence to Mr. Jagenal. What have you—what have I—to do with them? Don't think about it, Alec. It has nothing to do with us. No suspicion can possibly attach to us. Forget the whole business. The evening went off very well. The picture struck everybody very much. And I've laid the foundation for curiosity about the play. And as for the paper, I was going into the accounts this morning:

it is paying at the rate of three thousand a year. Alec, you have never until now been really and truly the cleverest man in London.'

CHAPTER XXIX

THE TRESPASS OFFERING

It was a day in midwinter. Over the adjacent island of Great Britain there was either a yellow fog, or a white fog, or a black fog. Perhaps there was no fog at all, but a black east wind, or there was melting snow, or there was cold sleet and rain: whatever there was, to be out of doors brought no joy, and the early darkness was tolerable because it closed and hid and put away the day. In the archipelago of Scilly, the sky was bright and clear: the sea was blue, except in the shallow places, where it was a light transparent green: the waves danced and sparkled: round the ledges of the rocks the white foam rolled and leaped: the sunshine was warm: the air was fresh. The girls stood on the northern carn

of Samson. They had been on the island now for eight months. For the greater part of that time they were alone. Only in the summer Archie came to pay them a visit. His play was accepted: it would probably be brought out in January, perhaps not till later, according to the success of the piece then running. Meantime, he had got introductions, thanks to Armorel's evening, and now found work enough to keep him going on one or two journals, where his occasional papers—the papers of a young and clever man feeling his way to style—were taken and published. And he was, of course, writing another play: he was in love with another heroine—happy, if he knew his own happiness, in starting on that rare career in which a man is always in love, and blamelessly, even with the knowledge of his wife, with a succession of the loveliest and most delightful damsels—country girls and princesses—lasses of the city and of the milking path—Dolly and Molly and stately Kate, and the Duchess of Dainty Device. As yet, he had only lost

his heart to two and was now raving over the second of his sweethearts. One such youth I have known and followed as he passed from the Twenties to the Thirties—to the Forties —even to the Fifties. He has always loved one girl after the other. He knows not how life can exist unless a man is in love: he is a mere slave and votary of Love: yet never with a goddess of the earth. He loves an image—a simulacrum—a phantom: and he looks on with joy and satisfaction—yea! the tears of happiness rise to his eyes when he sees that phantom at the last, after many cruel delays, fondly embraced—not by himself—but by another phantom. Happy lover! so to have lost the substance, yet to be satisfied with the shadow!

Except for Archie's visit they had no guests all through the summer. The holiday visitors mostly arrive at Hugh Town, sail across to Tresco Gardens and back, some the same day, some the next day, thinking they have seen Scilly. None of them land on Samson. Few there are who sail about the

Outer Islands where Armorel mostly loved to steer her boat. The two girls spent the whole time alone with each other for company. I do not know whether the literature of the country will be enriched by Effie's sojourn in Lyonesse, but one hopes. At least, she lost her pale cheeks and thin form: she put on roses, and she filled out: she became almost as strong as Armorel, almost as dexterous with the sheet, and almost as handy with the oar. But of verses I fear that few came to her. With the best intentions, with piles of books, these two maidens idled away the summer, basking on the headlands, lying among the fern, walking over the downs of Bryher and St. Martin's, sailing in and out among the channels, bathing in Porth Bay, or off the lonely beach of Ganilly in the Eastern group. Always something to see or something to do. Once they ventured to sail by themselves—a perilous voyage, but the day was calm—all the way round Bishop's Rock and back: another time they sailed—but this time they took Peter—among the Dogs of

Scilly, climbed up on Black Rosevean, and stood on Gorregan with the cruel teeth. Once, on a very calm day in July, they even threaded the narrow channel between the twin rocks known together as the Scilly. Always there was something new to do or to see. So the morning and the afternoon passed away, and there was nothing left but tea and a little music, and a stroll in the moonlight or beneath the stars, and a talk together, and so to bed: and if there came a rainy day, the cakes to make and the puddings to compose! A happy, lazy, idle, profitable time!

'We have been six months here and more, Effie,' said Armorel. They were sitting in the sunshine in the sheltered orchard, among the wrinkled and twisted old apple-trees. 'What next? When shall we think of going back to London? We must not stay here altogether, lest we rust. We will go back—shall we?—as soon as the short, dark days are over, and we will make a new departure somehow, but in what direction I do not quite

know. Shall we travel? Shall we cultivate society? What shall we do?'

'We will go back to London as soon as Archie's play is produced. Dear Armorel, I do not want ever to go away. I should like to stay here with you always and always. It has been a time of peace and quiet. Never before have I known such peace and such quiet. But we must go. We must go while the spell of the place is still upon us. Perhaps if we were to stay too long—Nature does not expect us to outstay her welcome—not that her welcome is exhausted yet—but if we go away, shall we ever come back? And, if so, will it be quite the same?'

'Nothing ever returns,' said Armorel the sage. 'We shall go away and we shall come back again, and there will be changes. Everything changes daily. The very music of the sea changes from day to day; but it is always music. My old grandmother in the great chair used to hold her hand to her ear—so—to catch the lapping of the waves and the washing of the tide among the rocks. It was

the music that she had known all her life. But the tune was different—the words of the song in her head were different—the key was changed—but always the music. Oh, my dear! I never tire of this music. We will go away, Effie: we must not stay too long here, lest we fall in love with solitude and renounce the world. But we will come back and hear the same music again, with a new song. We must go back.' She sighed. 'Eight months. We must go and see Archie's play. Archie! It will be a proud and glorious day for him, if it succeeds. It must succeed. And not a word or a sign all this time from Roland! What is he doing? Why——' She stopped.

Effie laid a hand on hers.

'You have been restless for some days, Armorel,' she said.

'Yes—yes. I do not doubt him. No—no—he has returned to himself. He can never—never again—I do not doubt him.' She sprang to her feet. 'Oh, Effie! I do not doubt, but sometimes I fear. What do I

fear? Why, I know there may be failure, but there can never again be disgrace.'

'You think of him so much, Armorel,' said Effie, with a touch of jealousy.

'I cannot think of him too much.' She looked out upon the sunlit sea at their feet, talking as one who talks to herself. 'How can I think of him too much? I have thought of him every day for five years—every day. I love him, Effie. How can you think too much of the man you love? Suppose I were to hear that he had failed again. That would make no difference. Suppose he were to sink low—low—deep down among the worst of men—that would make no difference. I love the man as he may be—as he shall be—by the help of God, if not in this world, then in the world to come! I love him, Effie!'

She stopped because her voice choked with a sob. The strength of her passion—not for nothing was the Castilian invader wrecked upon Scilly!—frightened the other girl. She had never dreamed of such a

passion; yet she knew that Armorel thought continually of this man. She did not dare to speak. She looked on with clasped hands, in silence.

Armorel softened again. The tumult of her heart subsided. She turned to Effie and kissed her.

'Forgive me, dear: you know now—but you have guessed already. Let us say no more. But I must see him soon. I must go to see him if he cannot come to see me. Let us go over the hill. This little orchard is like a hothouse this morning.'

When they reached the top of the hill they saw the steamer from Penzance rounding Bar Point on St. Mary's and coming through the North Channel.

'They have had a fine passage,' said Armorel. 'The boat must have done it in three hours. I wonder if she brings anything for us. It is too early for the magazines. I wrote for those books, but I doubt if there has been time. And I wrote to Philippa, but I do not expect a letter in reply by this post.'

'And I wrote to Archie, but I do not know whether I shall get a letter to-day. Suppose there should come a visitor?'

'Few visitors come to Scilly in the winter —and none to Samson. We are alone on our desert island, Effie. See, the steamer is entering the port: the tide is low: she cannot get alongside the quay. It is such a fine day that it is a pity we did not sail over this morning and meet the steamer. There goes the steam-launch from Tresco.'

It is quite a mile from Samson to the quay of Hugh Town; but the air was so clear that Armorel, whose eyes were as good as any ordinary field-glass, could plainly make out the agitation and bustle on the quay caused by the arrival of the steamer.

'The boat always carries my thoughts back to London,' said Armorel. 'And we have been talking about London, have we not? When I was a child the boat came into the Road out of the Unknown, and next day went back to the Unknown. What was the other side like? I filled it up with the vague

splendour of a child's imagination. The Unknown to me was like the sunrise or the sunset. Well . . . now I know. The poets say that knowledge makes us no happier. I think they are quite wrong. It is always better to know everything, even though it's little joy—

> To feel that Heaven is farther off
> Than when one was a boy.

'There is a boat,' she went on, after a while 'She is putting out from the port. I wonder what boat it is. Perhaps she is going to Bryher—or to St. Martin's—or to St. Agnes. It is not the lighthouse boat. She is sailing as if for Samson; but she cannot be coming here. What a lovely breeze! She would be here in a quarter of an hour. I suppose she must be going to Tresco. See what comes of living on a desert island. We are actually speculating about the voyage of a sailing-boat across the Road! Effie, we are little better than village gossips. You shall marry Mr. Paul Pry.'

'She looks very pretty,' said Effie, 'heeling over with the wind, wherever she is going.'

'They are steering south of Green Island,' said Armorel. 'That is very odd. If she had been making for Bryher or Tresco she would leave Green Island on the lee and steer up the channel past Puffin. I really believe that she is coming to Samson. I expect there is a parcel for us. Let us run down to the beach, Effie. We shall get there just in time.'

They ran down the hill. As the boatman lowered the sail and the boat grounded on the firm white sand of the beach, the girls arrived. The boat brought, however, no packet——

'Oh!' cried Effie. 'It is Roland Lee!'

It was none other than that young man of whom they had been speaking. Armorel changed colour: she blushed a rosy red: then she recovered quickly and stepped forward, as Roland leaped out upon the sand. 'Welcome back to Samson!' she said, giving

him her hand with her old frankness. 'We expected you to come, but we did not know when.'

'May I stay?' he murmured, taking her hand and looking into her face.

'You know—yourself,' she replied.

He made answer by shouldering his portmanteau. 'No new road has been made, I suppose,' he said. 'Shall I go first? How well I remember the way over the hill! Samson has changed little since I was here last.'

He led the way, all laughing and chatting as if his visit was expected, and as if it were the most natural thing in the world and the most common thing to run down to the beach and meet a morning caller from London Town. But Effie, who was as observant as a poet ought to be, saw how Roland kept looking round as he led, as if he would be still catching sight of Armorel.

'Come, Dorcas,' cried Armorel, when they arrived at the house. 'Come, Chessun—here is Mr. Roland Lee. You have not forgotten

Mr. Lee. He has come to stay with us again.' The serving-women came out and shook hands with him in friendly fashion. Forgotten Mr. Lee? Why, he was the only young man who had been seen at Holy Farm since Armorel's brothers were drowned—victims to the relentless wrath of those execrable rubies.

'You shall have your old room,' said Dorcas. 'Chessun will air the bed for you and light a fire to warm the room. Well, Mr. Lee, you are not much altered. Your beard is grown, and you're a bit stouter. Not much changed. You're married yet?'

'Not yet, Dorcas.'

'Armorel, she's a woman now. When you left her she was little better than a child. I say she's improved, but perhaps you wish she was a child again?'

'Indeed, no,' said Roland.

'Everything was quite commonplace. There was not the least romance about the return of the wanderer. It was half-past two.

He had had nothing to eat since breakfast, and after three hours and more upon the sea one is naturally hungry. Chessun laid the cloth and put the cold beef—cold boiled beef—upon the table. Pickles were also produced—a pickled walnut is not a romantic object. The young man was madly in love: he had come all the way from town on purpose to explain and dilate upon that wonderful accident: yet he took a pickled walnut. Nay, he was in a famishing condition, and he tackled the beef and beer—that old Brown George full of the home-brewed with a head of foam like the head of a venerable bishop—as if he was not in love at all. And Armorel sat opposite to him at the table talking to him about the voyage and his studio and whether he had furnished it, and all kinds of things, and Chessun hovered over him suggesting more pickles. And he laughed, and Armorel laughed—why not? They were both as happy as they could be. But Effie wondered how Armorel, whose heart was so full, whose

soul was so charged and heavy with love, could laugh thus gaily and talk thus idly.

After luncheon, which of course was, in Samson fashion, dinner, Roland got up and stood in the square window, looking out to sea. Armorel stood beside him.

'I remember standing here,' he said, 'one morning five years ago. A great deal has happened since then.'

'A great deal. We are older—we know more of the world.'

'We are stronger, Armorel'—their eyes met—'else I should not be here.'

It was quite natural that Armorel should put on her jacket and take her hat, and that they should go out together. Effie took her seat in the window and lay in the sunshine, a book neglected in her lap. Armorel had got her lover back. She loved him. Oh! she loved him. So heavenly is the contemplation of human love that Effie found it more soothing than the words of wisdom in her book, more full of comfort than any printed page. Human love, she knew well, would never

fall to her lot: all the more should she meditate on love in others. Well, she has her compensations: while others act she looks on: while others feel, she will tell the world, in her verse, what and how they feel: to be loved is the chief and crowning blessing for a woman, but such as Effie have their consolations.

She looked up, and saw old Dorcas standing in the door.

'They have gone out in the boat,' she said. 'When I saw him coming over the hill I said to Chessun, "He's come again. He's come for Armorel at last." I always knew he would. And now they've gone out in the boat to be quite alone. Is he worth her, Miss Effie? Is he worth my girl?'

'If he is not she will make him worth her. But nobody could be worth Armorel. Are you sure you are not mistaken, Dorcas?'

'No—no—no, I am not mistaken. The love-light is in his eyes, and the answering love in hers. I know the child. She loved him six years ago. She is as steadfast as the

compass. She can never change. Once love always love, and no other love. She has thought about him ever since. Why did she go away and leave us alone without her for five long years? She wanted to learn things so as to make herself fit for him. As if he would care what things she knew if only he loved her! 'Twas the beautiful maid he would love, with her soft heart and her tender voice and her steadfast ways—not what she knew.'

'Oh! but, Dorcas, perhaps—you are not quite sure—we do not know—one may be mistaken.'

'*You* may be mistaken, Miss Effie. As for me, I've been married for five and-fifty years. A woman of my age is never mistaken. I saw the love-light in his eyes, and I saw the answering love in hers. And I know my own girl that I've nursed and brought up since the cruel sea swallowed up her father and her mother and her brothers. No, Miss Effie, I know what I can see.'

One does not, as a rule, go in a small

open boat upon the water in December, even in Scilly, whose winter hath nor frost nor snow. But these two young people quite naturally, and without so much as asking whether it was summer or winter, got into the boat. Roland took the oars—Armorel sat in the stern. They put out from Samson what time the midwinter sun was sinking low. The tide was rising fast, and the wind was from the south-east. When they were clear of Green Island, Roland hoisted the sail.

'I have a fancy,' he said, 'to sail out to Round Island and to see Camber Rock again, this first day of my return. Shall we have time? We can let the sun go down: there will be light enough yet for an hour. You can steer the craft in the dark, Armorel. You are captain of this boat, and I am your crew. You can steer me safely home, even on the darkest night—in the blackest time,' he added, with a deeper meaning than lay in his simple words.

The sail caught the breeze, and the boat

heeled over. Roland sat holding the rope while Armorel steered. Neither spoke. They sailed up New Grinsey Channel between Tresco and Bryher, past Hangman's Island, past Cromwell's Castle. They sailed right through beyond the rocks and ledges out lying Tresco, outside Menovawr, the great triple rock, with his two narrow channels, and so to the north of Round Island. The sky was aflame: the waters were splendid with the colours of the west. They rounded the island. Then Roland lowered the sail and put out the oars. 'We must row now,' he said. 'How glorious it all is! I am back again. Nine short months ago — you remember, Armorel?—how could I have hoped to come here again—to sail with you in your boat?'

'Yet you are here,' she said simply.

'I have so much to say, and I could not say it, except in the boat.'

'Yes, Roland.'

'First of all, I have sold that picture. It is not a great price that I have taken. But I have sold it. You will be pleased to hear

that. Next, I have two commissions, at a better price. Don't believe, Armorel, that I am thinking about nothing but money. The first step towards success, remember, is to be self-supporting. Well—I have taken that first step. I have also obtained some work on an illustrated paper. That keeps me going. I have regained my lost position—and more—more, Armorel. The way is open to me at last: everything is open to me now, if I can force myself to the front.'

'No man can ask for more, can he?

'No. He cannot. As for the time, Armorel, the horrible, shameful time——'

'Roland, you said you would not come here until the shame of that time belonged altogether to the past.'

'It does: it does: yet the memory lingers—sometimes, at night, I think of it—and I am abased.'

'We cannot forget—I suppose we can never forget. That is the burden which we lay upon ourselves. Oh! we must all walk humbly, because we have all fallen so far

short of the best, and because we cannot forget.'

'But—to be forgiven. That also is so hard.'

'Oh! Roland, you mistake. We can always forgive those we love—yes—everything—everything—until seventy times seven. How can we love if we cannot forgive? The difficulty is to forgive ourselves. We shall do that when we have risen high enough to understand how great a thing is the soul—I don't know how to put what I wish to say. Once I read in a book that there was a soul who wished—who would not?—to enter into heaven. The doors were wide open: the hands of the angels were held out in love and welcome: but the soul shrank back. "I cannot enter," he said, "I cannot forgive myself." You must learn to forgive yourself, Roland. As for those who love you, they ask for nothing more than to see your foot upon the upward slope.'

'It is there, Armorel. Twice you have saved me: once from death by drowning:

once from a worse death still—the second death. Twice your arms have been stretched out to save me from destruction.'

They were silent again. The boat rocked gently in the water; the setting sun upon Armorel's face lent her cheek a warmer, softer glow, and lit her eyes, which were suffused with tears. Roland, sitting in his place, started up and dipped the oars again.

'It is nearly half-tide now,' he said. 'Let us row through the Camber Pass. I want to see that dark ravine again. It is the place I painted with you—you of the present, not of the past—in it. I have sold the picture, but I have a copy. Now I have two paintings, with you in each. One hangs in the studio, and the other in my own room, so that by night as well as by day I feel that my guardian angel is always with me.'

Through the narrow ravine between Camber Rock and Round Island the water races and boils and roars when the tide runs strongly. Now, it was flowing gently—almost still. The sun was so low that the

rock on the east side was obscured by the great mass of Round Island: the channel was quite dark. The dipping of the oars echoed along the black walls of rock; but overhead there was the soft and glowing sky, and in the light blue already appeared two or three stars.

'A strange thing has happened to me, Armorel,' Roland said, speaking low, as if in a church—'a very strange and wonderful thing. It is a thing which connects me with you and with your people and with the Island of Samson. You remember the story told us one evening—the evening before I left you—by the Ancient Lady?'

'Of course. She told that story so often, and I used to suffer such agonies of shame that my ancestor should act so basely, and such terrors in thinking of the fate of his soul, that I am not likely to forget the story.'

'You remember that she mistook me for Robert Fletcher?'

'Yes; I remember.'

'She was not so very far wrong, Armorel, because, you see, I am Robert Fletcher's great-grandson.'

'Oh! Roland! Is it possible?'

'I suppose that there may have been some resemblance. She forgot the present, and was carried back in imagination to the past, eighty years ago.'

'Oh! And you did not know?'

'If you think of it, Armorel, very few middle-class people are able to tell the maiden name of their grandmother. We do not keep our genealogies, as we should.'

'Then how did you find it out?'

'Mr. Jagenal, your lawyer, found it out. He sent for me and proved it quite clearly. Robert Fletcher left three daughters. The eldest died unmarried: the second and third married. I am the grandson of the second daughter who went to Australia. Now, which is very odd, the only grandson of the third daughter is a man whose name you may remember. They call him Alec Feilding. He is at once a painter, a poet, a novelist,

and is about to become, I hear, a dramatist. He is my own cousin. This is strange, is it not?'

'Oh! It is wonderful.'

'Mr. Jagenal, at the same time, made me a communication. He was instructed, he said, by you. Therefore, you know the nature of the communication.'

'He gave you the rubies.'

'Yes. He gave them to me. I have brought them back. They are in my pocket. I restore them to you, Armorel.' He drew forth the packet—the case of shagreen—and laid it in Armorel's lap.

'Keep them. I will not have them. Let me never see them.' She gave them back to him quickly. 'Keep them out of my sight, Roland. They are horrible things. They bring disaster and destruction.'

'You will not have them? You positively refuse to have them? Then I can keep them to myself. Why—that is brave!' He opened the case and unrolled the silken wrapper.

'See, Armorel, the pretty things! They

sparkle in the dying light. Do you know that they are worth many thousands? You have given me a fortune. I am rich at last. What is there in the world to compare with being rich? Now I can buy anything I want. The Way of Wealth is the Way of Pleasure. What did I tell you? My feet were dragged into that way as if with ropes: now they can go dancing of their own accord—no need to drag them. They fly—they trip—they have wings. What is art?—what is work?—what is the soul?—nothing! Here'—he took up a handful of the stones and dropped them back again—'here, Armorel, is what will purchase pleasure—solid comfort! I shall live in ease and sloth: I shall do nothing: I shall feast every day: everybody will call me a great painter because I am rich. Oh! I have a splendid vision of the days to come, when I have turned these glittering things into cash! Farewell drudgery—I am rich! Farewell disappointment—I am rich! Farewell servitude—I am rich! Farewell work and struggle—I am rich! Why should I care

any more for Art? I am rich, Armorel! I am rich!'

'That is not all you are going to say about the rubies, Roland. Come to the conclusion.'

'Not quite all. In the old days I flung away everything for the Way of Wealth and the Way of Pleasure—as I thought. Good Heavens! What Wealth came to me? What Pleasure? Well, Armorel, in your presence I now throw away the wealth. Since you will not have it, I will not.'

He seized the case as if he would throw it overboard. She leaned forward eagerly and stopped him.

'Will you really do this, Roland? Stop a moment. Think. It is a great sacrifice. You might use that wealth for all kinds of good and useful things. You could command the making of beautiful things: you could help yourself in your Art: you could travel and study—you could do a great deal, you know, with all this money. Think, before you do what can never be undone.'

Roland, for reply, laid the rubies again in her lap. It was as if one should bring a Trespass offering and lay it upon the altar. The case was open, and the light was still strong enough overhead for the rubies to be seen in a glittering heap.

He took them up again. 'Do you consent, Armorel?'

She bowed her head.

He took a handful of the stones and dropped them in the water. There was a little splash, and the precious stones, the fortune of Robert Fletcher, the gems of the Burmah mines, dropped like a shower upon the surface. They were, as we know, nothing but bits of paste and glass, but this he did not know. And therefore the Trespass offering was rich and precious. Then he took the silken kerchief which had wrapped them and threw the rest away, as one throws into the sea a handful of pebbles picked up on the beach.

'So,' he said, 'that is done. And now I

am poor again. You shall keep the empty case, Armorel, if you like.'

'No—no. I do not want even the case. I want never to be reminded again of the rubies and the story of Robert Fletcher.' Roland dipped the oars again, and with two or three vigorous strokes pulled the boat out of the dark channel—the tomb of his wealth—into the open water beyond. There in the dying light the puffins swam and dived, and the seagulls screamed as they flew overhead, and on the edge of the rocks the shags stood in meditative rows.

Far away in the studio of the poet-painter—the cleverest man in London—sat two who were uneasy with the same gnawing anxiety. Roland Lee—they knew by this time—had the rubies. When would the discovery be made? When would there be an inquiry? What would come out? As the time goes on this anxiety will grow less, but it will never wholly vanish. It will change perhaps into curiosity

as to what has been done with those bits of glass and paste. Why has not Roland found out? He must have given them to his wife, and she must have kept them locked up. Some day it will be discovered that they are valueless. But then it will be far too late for any inquiry. As yet they do not speak to each other of the thing. It is too recent. Roland Lee has but just acquired his fortune: he is still gloating over the stones: he is building castles in the air: he is planning his future. When he finds out the truth about them—what will happen then?

'I have had a bad dream of temptation with rubies, Armorel. Temptation harder than you would believe. How calm is the sea to-night! How warm the air! The last light of the west lies on your cheek, and—Armorel! Oh! Armorel!'

It was nearly six o'clock, long after dark, when the two came home. They walked over the hill hand in hand. They entered the room hand in hand, their faces grave and solemn.

I know not what things had been said between them, but they were things quite sacred. Only the lighter things—the things of the surface—the things that everybody expects—can be set down concerning love. The tears stood in Armorel's eyes. And, as if Effie had not been in the room at all, she held out both her hands for her lover to take, and when he bent his head she raised her face to meet his lips.

'You have come back to me, Roland,' she said. 'You have grown so tall—so tall—grown to your full height. Welcome home!'

At seven the door opened and the serving-folk came in. First marched Justinian, bowed and bent, but still active. Then Dorcas, also bowed and bent, but active. Then Chessun. Effie turned down the lamp.

Dorcas stood for a moment, while Chessun placed the chairs, gazing upon Roland, who stood erect as a soldier surveyed by his captain.

'You have got a good face,' she said, 'if a loving face is a good face. If you love her

you will make her happy. If she loves you your lot is happy. If you deserve her, you are not far from the Kingdom of Heaven.'

'Your words, Dorcas,' he replied, 'are of good omen.'

'Chessun shall make a posset to-night,' she said. 'If ever a posset was made, one shall be made to-night—a sherry posset! I remember the posset for your mother, Armorel, and for your grandmother, the first day she came here with her sweetheart. A sherry posset you shall have—hot and strong!'

The old man sat down and threw small lumps of coal upon the fire. Then the flames leaped up, and the red light played about the room and showed the golden torque round Armorel's neck and played upon her glowing face as she took her fiddle and stood up in the old place to play to them in the old fashion.

Dorcas sat opposite her husband. At her left hand, Chessun with her spinning-wheel. It was all—except for the Ancient Lady and the hooded chair—all exactly as Roland remembered it nearly six years before. Yet, as

Armorel said, though outside there was the music of the waves and within the music of her violin—the music was set to other words and arranged for another key. Between himself of that time and of the present, how great a gulf!

Armorel finished tuning, and looked towards her master.

'"Dissembling Love"!' he commanded. 'Tis a moving piece, and you play it rarely "Dissembling Love"!'

THE END.

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